The Illuminated Rumi Study Guide

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

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Who Are These Two?

Who Are These Two? Summary

Coleman Barks' commentary tells the story of Jelaluddin Rumi, a Middle Eastern doctor of theology living in Turkey, meeting Shams, an uneducated wandering dervish monk. Shams asked Rumi who was greater, Muhammad, the messenger of God, or Bestami, a mystic who claimed to be one with God. Rumi realized the greatness of Shams and his depth of thinking, and fell off his donkey, unconscious. Rumi, on regaining consciousness, replied that Bestami saw only a small portion of knowledge and glory, while Muhammad realized the depth and breadth of glory that he'd only tasted. Shams, too, realized the greatness of Rumi's thought and found a spiritual fellowship with him.

Rumi and Shams went on long retreats together, but Rumi's students saw Shams as a madman. Eventually, Shams was forced out of the area. Rumi sent his son Sultan Veled to bring Shams back. Veled found Shams in Damascus playing cards with the future St. Francis of Assisi. When young Francis confessed, Shams refused to take back his money. Shams was exiled and returned several times and was killed on December 5, 1247. The body disappeared, and Rumi could not believe his friend was dead and searched for him, finally realizing that Shams was indeed inside him. This was when Rumi began writing his poetry, referring often to Shams, whose name meant the sun.

Rumi's poem asks a series of questions, about who performs spiritual tasks: rising to discover the beginning of light; finding humanity dazed and disoriented; finding the moon in a spring of water; recovering sight, like Jacob, by smelling the shirt of a lost son. It asks who brings a prophet up from a well, or discovers truth when going for fire. It refers to Moses, to Jesus finding a door to another world as he flees enemies, to Solomon finding a gold ring in a fish, and to Omar who is bent on killing the Prophet but converted after rushing in. The poem uses the metaphors of an oyster that drinks and creates a pearl, and a vagrant who discovers wealth in ruins. The poem urges the reader to open him- or herself and begin walking toward Shams, the sun. At first, the traveler's legs will be tired, but then the traveler will grow wings.

Who Are These Two? Analysis

The poem is unrhymed and unmetered, but it is also an English translation written originally in Persian. Rumi's poem is about enlightenment, and it makes heavy use of metaphor and allusion to spiritual figures. The metaphors and allusions that the poem uses are all about making a spiritual discovery in the process of living life. These spiritual discoveries are accidents that happen along one's path in life. The poet refers to spiritual leaders as making these same accidental discoveries, which is reminiscent of the story that Barks tells in his commentary of Rumi's meeting with Shams and falling unconscious as he realized the spiritual greatness of the companion he'd found. Rumi

was merely riding a donkey through the town, just as the poem gives the example of Moses going to find fire and finding instead something burning, the heart of the sunrise.

Solomon's gold ring inside the fish (and the beggar who finds wealth in empty ruins) are not literally referring to finding wealth. The "wealth" that they find is spiritual wealth, just as Jesus's find is a door to another world, and Omar's find is the blessing of the Prophet. The poem is a call to action. It drives the reader to find his or her own spiritual journey. The ending of the poem is in metaphor as well, describing this spiritual journey as difficult and tiring, until the moment of uplifting comes.

The Whole Catastrophe

The Whole Catastrophe Summary

In Barks' commentary, he calls Rumi a True Human Being, an enlightened one, who then slipped back into the "catastrophe" of human life. Still, Rumi's poetry has spiritual power. Barks retells the story of Joseph and Jacob, which often figures in Rumi's poetry. Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. His brothers bring back Joseph's cloak with blood on it, as proof Joseph has been killed by wolves. However, Joseph eventually comes into power in his new land of Egypt. Shirt imagery fills the story, as Zuleikha, an Egyptian woman in love with Joseph, clings to his shirt and tears it off him. In Islamic versions, Joseph later gives his brothers his shirt to put over his father's blinded eyes, restoring his father's vision.

Rumi's poem begins with a verse that calls the human form a distraction and a prison, trying to open. It continues, human beings sit in the darkness, in hell, afraid of immortality. The writer wonders where he came from and what his reason for being is. The soul is not of this world, but what is it? The writer compares himself to a bird in a cage far from its original land and then says that whoever brought him here must bring him home.

The tone becomes despondent, with the writer forgetting what companionship is, in a dark and forgetful place, warning others not to come near. He uses the metaphor of the black sky that can't stand the moon, hating the powerful and avoiding invitations. He avoids love and doesn't want wealth. All control is pretended, and authorities are fakes or just tools of something greater, the writer adds, using a metaphor of a brush wielded by a painter.

Human beings, he reiterates, don't know what they are. They carry power, but lock it up. The writer uses the metaphor of gold that wants to stay melted instead of forming into coins. He speaks of a night of talking, which is building up. Loving and not loving is the key to everything. After the night passes, there is work to be done, before the swan spreads its wings.

The writer continues with more metaphor. He warns that the reader will fail to see the garden, too focused on a single fig and will fail to meet a beauty while distracted by an old woman. The writer cries over the loss, saying that death will reveal the truth. The writer urges the reader to be drawn to what the reader truly loves, not distracted from it.

The Whole Catastrophe Analysis

The shirt, which lies over the heart, becomes a symbol of the heart and therefore of love, which is why it can cure Jacob's blindness. Joseph is the enlightened one, who has gone through a difficult journey and risen from slavery, and his love has curative powers. Although Joseph rises to material power, Rumi is concerned with the soul and

spirituality, not the material. He sees the material world and the physical body as obstacles to be overcome. He cannot define the soul, but he sees it as being from elsewhere. The metaphor of the caged bird represents the soul, wrenched from a far-off exotic land, living in the cage of the body.

In this poem, Rumi writes of being lost in the material and alone, separated from the origin of the soul. The black sky represents the material, and the moon (and light generally in Rumi's poetry) represents the spiritual. When Rumi writes of being a black sky that can't stand the moon, he is writing of being lost in the sorrow of the physical world, unable to even look for the spiritual world. This is the darkest place for Rumi, since it rejects even the possibility of light. The light Rumi seeks is, he believes, inside of himself and every person. He goes back again and again to the idea that something bright, vivid, and valuable lives inside the human being—a soul. The soul is valuable and powerful, yet Rumi sees human beings as turning their backs upon it, upon themselves.

Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey

Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey Summary

"Rise Up Nimbly" begins with a prose writing by Rumi called "The Real Work," stating that human beings should not forget their real work, the work of spirituality. He compares a human being who does not explore his own spirituality to a man who cooks turnips in a bowl made of gold or who hangs a valuable dagger on the wall as a peg. It is a waste of what is valuable.

Rumi's poem begins with the prophets wondering, in metaphor, about the uselessness of their task. The author urges the reader to take risks, using a metaphor of taking to sea, although the ship may or may not sink. He talks of the amazing things the prophets have done: Abraham wearing fire, Moses talking to the sea, Solomon riding the wind. The writer urges the reader to not hesitate and to work as hard in the spiritual world as in the material world, promising a reward.

The author urges the reader to go on a journey to find meaning, using the metaphor of an ocean journey. Moving to another metaphor, the author says that a stream must travel down the mountain, just as human beings must journey toward spiritual meaning. The sleeper will be torn away. The mountain will be melted. The ocean will be drained. The present life must be left behind for a spiritual journey.

Rumi uses a metaphor for how human beings can change. A worm addicted to eating grape leaves wakes, no longer a worm. Instead, he's the vineyard and orchard, and everything in and of it, with no need to eat. He says that lovers desire each other, but it's the same spiritual search, a search to become one not just with a lover but with all things.

Rumi says Jesus was miraculous for himself, not for the future, and urges the reader to focus on the now and not look ahead. The present, with all its good and bad, is the most important thing, and all people are together in it. The world is unified, and the writer sees himself in everything: vision, language, the night, the rose. He wants to be in and of everything. He talks to a "you," who he is always with, who knows all, and who is "more than love."

The poem tells the first-person story of a reed: The reed is cut and cries, separated from the reed bed. The message is that we all long to go back to what we came from. Spirit and body are combined, and the reed flute is the friend of all, a mixture of hurt and healing, separated from its origin and longing for it, while providing friendship and intimacy and love.

Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey Analysis

Discovering the soul and the spirituality that Rumi writes about is what both he and Barks refer to as the "real work." In the metaphors of the golden bowl used to cook turnips and the valuable dagger used as a hook in the kitchen, the bowl and the dagger represent the self or soul, the valuable inner center of the human being. This is the power that Rumi writes about in his other poems. Elsewhere, he uses the metaphor of a valuable gem. Using a gold bowl to boil turnips (that is, using the human being to study and do worldly things) is a waste of something precious.

Rumi believes the work of spirituality is going on a personal, inner journey, one that is difficult and risky. This is why Rumi urges the reader to take risks. The metaphor of the ship's journey represents this spiritual journey. The sea journey is dangerous, and a cautious person might be afraid to sink at sea. Rumi sees the metaphorical wealth to be gained from a spiritual journey as worth any risk. He pulls examples from the prophets to represent this potential gain, including Moses parting the Red Sea. He believes that each individual spiritual journey will deliver wonder as great as the biblical stories.

Rumi elaborates on the end of the spiritual journey with the metaphor of the worm who becomes the vineyard. Through eating of the grape leaves, the worm becomes the vineyard. When a person successfully finds enlightenment, he or she will be joined with the universe, much as the worm becomes truly one with the vineyard. The focus on experiencing the now and being in the present is a focus on being one with the whole universe in its current moment.

The story of the reed goes back to Rumi's vision of the soul as something from elsewhere. Like the caged bird, the reed is a metaphor for the soul, which has been ripped from its source, where it was joined with a greater whole (the reed bed). Since the soul has been ripped from its source, it cries out to return to it.

Come to the Orchard

Come to the Orchard Summary

Barks's commentary says the orchard represents the imagination where the spiritual journey takes place. He says Rumi talks about the tasks of everyday life, from talking to a barber to eating cabbage broth, and brings this starting point into the realm of the spiritual. Barks ends with a story of Ramakrishna, approached by a person who wants to bring his cousin to see the spiritual leader, but whose cousin is reluctant. The leader says to tell the cousin that they have fish soup. The ordinary life is the inroad to the spiritual life.

Rumi's poem begins by urging the reader to walk though the destination is unclear, not for human understanding. Every day, everyone wakes up with fear. Instead of acting from fear, he says, let your soul move you, playing music instead of reading. He asks the reader to be driven by beauty and love. Rumi uses another metaphor: a baby pigeon in its nest hears a whistle and is driven to fly. Rumi urges the reader to take off in flight and stop waiting or fearing. Love is what pulls you.

The writer compares the pull of love to a river, encouraging the reader to embrace it and saying that it's more than the old study of religion. He compares those who do not embrace the beauty of nature or want to find insights in book-study to sleepers who will not wake to the truth. He uses the similes of drinking dawn like water or eating sunset to describe what the journey-maker must do. He urges the reader to let go the brain, the covering cloths, and to be naked.

The poem continues with the metaphor of the orchard. Rumi tells the reader to come to the orchard in the spring, but that the light and wine and sweethearts that are there do not matter, whether or not you come to the orchard. He describes the frenzied flying of birds and particles, asking if the one he loves is everywhere. He has been knocking on a door, he says, only to find he's been inside, waiting to be let out.

Come to the Orchard Analysis

Both Barks and Rumi use stories as examples to illustrate their meanings, much as Jesus used parables to communicate messages to his followers. Barks's story about Ramakrishna is this type of parable, illustrating the need to reach people in their everyday lives through their everyday activities, in order to bring them into a spiritual life.

Rumi again refers to the spiritual journey in his poem and elaborates that the journey is not one that is prescribed from outside. Again and again, Rumi reiterates that spirituality is not something that can be learned from someone else. Spirituality comes from work that one does within one's self. When Rumi pleads with the reader to start on a journey, even though the destination is unclear, he is urging the reader to go on a journey that no

one can know because the journey is a personal one that only the individual can experience. The journey is not one of study or of the mind. It is one of feeling and experiencing that happens on a deep inner level. Rumi believes there is an inherent instinct that leads the human being on this journey, just as a bird can instinctively fly from the nest. Letting go of what one knows and what one fears is part of experiencing this journey. The end of the journey is the orchard, Rumi's metaphor for the spiritual land beyond the limits of normal human reality.

There Is a Breathing

There Is a Breathing Summary

Barks's commentary discusses how commonly breathing is recommended as a way to calm yourself. Breathing, he says, brings you into the present moment. Barks enumerates other methods of building spirituality by being in the moment, such as meditation, fasting, or walking. He says Rumi recommends relishing these. Barks says that repetition can be spiritual, not numbing.

Rumi's poem enumerates the parts of a person and their purposes. The eye is for seeing; the soul for joy. The head is for loving; the legs for running. The mind is for learning. The writer says, however, that some mysteries aren't meant to be known, and the road to Mecca is filled with danger. The destination makes the dangerous journey worthwhile. Then, the writer compares his talk to making coins, saying that they accumulate while the real work is going on elsewhere.

The next section is titled "Breathing." It says there are two ways of breathing, one that suffocates and another, a breath of love, that opens you. This is followed by a page of Barks's commentary, saying that some scientists suggest that tidal rhythms are a part of our body rhythms, but Rumi suggests there is a deeper natural rhythm. He describes paying attention to the breath and letting go of the self with outward breaths, with a mantra translated as, "The 'I' is an illusion." The inward breath brings a presence, through the head to the heart, with the mantra, "God alone is real."

In the following poem, the narrator says he is no religion or culture, not east or west, not from the ocean or the ground, natural or unnatural, or made of elements. He is nothing, not from an origin story, not body or soul. The narrator belongs to what is loved and sees the two worlds joined, and the joined world calling to breath.

The next poem is titled "A daily practice." It describes lovers waking and drinking water. The woman asks if the man loves himself or her more. He compares himself to a ruby in the sunrise, saying that he is lost in her reflection. Rumi compares this to Hallaj saying he is God. The writer exhorts the reader to keep working, searching for water in a daily practice. He compares daily spiritual practice to continuing to knock at a door to eventually contact the joy inside.

The next poem, "Roar," asks the one who brings the mysteries, the lion of the heart to roar and rend open the writer. "Fasting" compares humans to lutes and says emptiness inside allows music. Fullness oppresses the soul, and emptiness frees it. When you fast, the writer says, you will find Jesus's table spread with better food. "Bend, Tend, Disappear" describes the change when the heart opens in the orchard. The writer describes becoming light and fragrance, walking without feet, like running water, and becoming "me." He says to bend like a tree limb, tend the needy, and disappear with the

moon each month, warning not to pray for healing or look for evidence of the supernatural. Instead, he says, you are your own soul and medicine.

In "Give birth slowly," Rumi uses the new moon as a metaphor for patience and slowness in creation, advocating forty early mornings of spiritual questing and comparing them to the nine months of preparation for birth. In "Some nights stay up till dawn," the poet quotes Muhammad saying he will come take you before dawn. Rumi is amazed that a person would need to be dragged away on a spiritual journey, saying that few make the journey by choice. He compares the spiritual journey to children needing to be forced to go to school. He extols the reader to stay up all night, like the moon, to find enlightenment. Rumi says the night is a marriage, a couple saying the same words together, behind the curtain of darkness.

There Is a Breathing Analysis

The section "There Is a Breathing" deals with the ways that people can go about going on a spiritual journey. Rumi recommends disciplines to tackle this journey. Rumi often decries his own poetry by urging the reader not to read but to go out and experience. The metaphor of making coins reflects this sentiment. Coins are not essential materials. They are a construction of society, through which people ultimately get what they need. The "real work" of tilling soil or building houses is going on elsewhere. Similarly, the real spiritual work does not happen when someone reads a poem, but when someone goes out and finds or fills their spiritual needs. The poem becomes a kind of currency to help the reader acquire what's needed, not the thing itself.

Rumi's methods of reaching spiritual awareness are about being in the moment and experiencing the self and one's existence. Breathing is about being. The focus is on the now and on the self. The non-religion, non-place, non-thing that Rumi describes in this poem and others is the spiritual plane. It is indescribable because it is completely separated from the world of humanity and cannot be accessed while the human world is a distraction. This is a reason why Rumi also recommends fasting. Fasting is a denial of the physical and a breaking away from the daily bodily needs. It brings a different kind of wealth, a spiritual wealth.

The comparison of the soul to a gem arises in "A daily practice." The gem of the soul is valuable, but it is merely a reflection of something greater. In the context of the sunrise, the ruby is just one small glint. The point of the daily practice is to continue on in the journey to find the larger self that encompasses all the light of the sun. Rumi believes this journey must be worked at steadily and that it's a difficult and long journey that takes discipline.

I Would Love to Kiss You

I Would Love to Kiss You Summary

The poet describes the desired kiss as the soul coming up into the lips. The soul is described as a tree, and the author says it imbues everything except his rough personality. The poet describes a friend as all things: intelligence, the soul, bread and water, a cave, health, a spring, a cloud. He finally stops his list, to keep a bird from flying away.

Barks's commentary wonders about the friend and the "you" to whom Rumi writes. Instead of a person, Barks suggests the "you" is an impulse to spirituality. According to Sufis, love resolves separation and brings one closer to God. Anyone or thing that is loved reflects the lover's spirituality.

The next poem describes beauty in any meeting or gathering, the presence of love, of "the Friend." The poet asks for a ladder to climb into the Friend, and the response is that the ladder is your head. A bow brings it below the feet. In the mind, you can find new roads, the poet says. Kissing the presence, at the price of one's life, is a bargain. The poet says that love is a gamble worth everything, and half-heartedness gets you nothing. He urges the reader to dive into the ocean.

The poem lists pronouns (I, you, he, she, we) and says these differences don't exist in the garden of mystic lovers. Lovers have to fall into a hole, but they find something of infinite value. The poet talks in metaphors of falling: the moon dropped her clothes, and the poet fell up. In the boat of himself, he cannot stay above the water. The poet describes the onset of happiness for an unknown reason. It becomes easy to surrender, but the joy is inexplicable. Shams comes down from the roof, the poet says, and we become his doorkeepers.

The poet says that the reader is what every religion intends, urging madness from love and weeping, and urging a lack of fear and a focus on the moment. He refers to a oneness and loss of self. Then, the poet talks about qalandars, wandering Sufis who laugh and love at everything and are in turmoil inside. He describes them as being drunk with everything. The poet describes someone who wants little and only needs a half loaf of bread and a small nest around him, saying he is a letter to everyone saying, "Live."

The poet describes love as a madman wielding a knife, a nihilist who embraces destruction. He urges the reader to let go of fear and jump into the ocean. He asks the reader to give everything, not to dull the drum's noise with a blanket, but to be completely open. He says to "tear down this house," meaning the house of the self, to find the precious jewel of the soul. He extends the metaphor of the house, urging the hard work of its destruction before it falls down and the valuable gem beneath is lost. The poet says he would die into love, as clouds disappear in sun.

I Would Love to Kiss You Analysis

For Rumi, love and lovers are larger than the love between two people. Love is always spiritual. Confining love to a personal relationship is a mistake because love is the means to open up a world of spirituality beyond the normal world of humanity. When Rumi's poetry refers to lovers, he is often using the lovers as a synecdoche, a type of metaphor that uses the part to represent the whole. The Friend is so many different things because he is not merely a friend but a spiritual leader and one with the larger spiritual essence. Even the self/soul is a synecdoche of sorts: a small part of the great ocean of spirituality that both represents it and seeks it.

The journey of spiritual discovery means turning one's back on physical things and embracing only this greater love, which exists inside of one's heart and soul. The metaphor of tearing down the house is Rumi's metaphor for this. Again, Rumi represents the soul/center as a gem, this time a carnelian. The gem is buried deep inside the self, and all the outer trappings that have been built up through culture and through daily life are the house in the metaphor. The house must be torn down to get to the far more valuable thing that lies beneath. The gem represents the same element as the golden bowl used to boil turnips or the valuable dagger used as a hook, except in this metaphor, the valuable element is not being underutilized but instead buried and wasted through non-use. The spiritual journey is to destroy the house and uncover the gem beneath it, which is far more valuable.

The Path of Blame

The Path of Blame Summary

Barks's commentary, titled "The Hurt We Embrace," which is the first line of the following poem, talks about the pain of surrendering to love, which brings to light all one's flaws. He says that Shams said Rumi wrote in three ways, one that only Rumi could read, one that everyone could read, and one that no one could read. Shams said that he was the third way of writing, or script. Shams also said that what we're really worshiping is each other. The spiritual journey Shams and Rumi discuss is a difficult one that breaks down the self to find the basic roots of religion in humanity.

Rumi's poem says that embracing hurt transforms it into joy. He uses a silkworm inside its cocoon as a metaphor for man's journey into himself. The poet says he doesn't regret love or passion but owns everyone's flaws. He creates an analogy, comparing the breaking up of the soul to tilling soil to plant roses and trees. He also says that everywhere we go we perceive others as we ourselves are, just as a cow would ignore the amazing city of Baghdad and see only a watermelon rind and some hay. He asks the reader to cleanse himself, embrace change, and see beyond the self. He says that humans must explore the reality of humanity, the grittiness of the soul and not live in the ideal.

Rumi reminds the reader of Moses's trip through the wilderness and Joseph's trip to Egypt, hard journeys of enlightenment. Rumi tells the reader to start crawling, to start on the journey, and to pray even if you don't mean it. Rumi describes varying daily emotions as visitors arriving and says to welcome them, even the negative emotions. He asks the reader to accept troubles, as everything is a gift from a higher place.

The poet tells the story of a man calling to Allah. A cynic asks if he's ever gotten a reply. The man, with no response, stopped praying. Then he dreamed of Khidr, a guide of souls, who told him the reply to his prayers was his own longing. The longing is the reason for praying. The writer asks the reader to forget life and living and to embrace God fully. He asks the reader to make a commitment, abhorring spiritual "windowshoppers." He says it does not matter what you do, as long as you start the journey. Do something, no matter what others think, even if it's a foolish project like Noah's ark.

The Path of Blame Analysis

The basis of Rumi's spirituality is transformation, and transformation is something that takes place within one's self in a solitary journey into the inner being. The silkworm makes a good metaphor for this, because the worm retreats into the cocoon much as Rumi sees a person retreating into his or herself on a spiritual quest. However, the spiritual quest within the self is not a solitary one. It is a quest that ultimately unties one

with all humanity in a great spiritual pool (the bed of reeds, the land the caged bird comes from, the ocean that one's soul is but a drop in). Through solitary inner exploration, one comes to a great unity with all humanity, which is why Barks brings up Shams saying that what we really worship is each other. The spiritual realm is one of all spirits, and all souls are untied in it.

Several times, Rumi alludes to the metaphor of breaking up the soil to plant a garden. This metaphor itself relates to Rumi's metaphoric orchard or garden as the spiritual place that souls seek beyond the realm of humanity. The soil is the normal, human world, and the garden is the spiritual world. The soil must be broken in order for the garden to grow, just as the house must be torn down in order to uncover the gem beneath. Rumi also sees humanity as blinded. Just as a cow can only see things of interest to a cow in a cow-world, humans can only see things of interest to humans in a human-world. Spirituality opens a new world and removes the blinders of humanity, but it is only accessible through delving honestly into the human soul.

Again, Rumi refers to biblical prophets to make a point about spirituality. Moses's journey through the wilderness is a metaphorical spiritual journey, as is Joseph's slavery and rise in Egypt. Both travel through hardships to find a reward on the other side of the journey. Rumi sees sorrows and negative emotions as difficulties that must be faced along this path, and the reason he asks the reader to welcome them is because Rumi sees difficulties and troubles as forces designed to make a person grow and transform. The story of calling to Allah relates to Rumi's metaphor of the reed. Calling to Allah is the fundamental self, the soul, calling out to whence it came, just as the reed longs for the reed bed from which it was cut.

I Have Such a Teacher

I Have Such a Teacher Summary

Barks's commentary talks about his teacher Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, who taught both Barks and the book's illustrator Michael Green. Bawa was a Sufi like Rumi, who lived alone in the jungle before beginning to teach in Sri Lanka in the 1940s and taught in Philadelphia in the 1970s. He taught until he died in 1986. Barks says Bawa's teachings helped him appreciate Rumi and encouraged Barks and Green to bring Rumi's poetry to the west. The following poem was written by Rumi on his deathbed.

Rumi's poem begins by stating that death is the only cure. In a dream, an old man in a garden of love reached out to call him forward. The poet's teacher taught him to have and want nothing. The elements of the world around him become his clothes and jewels. The poet describes flowers appearing in his teacher's footsteps and washing his hands turning the water to gold. The teacher speaking scripture brings the dead students of scripture to life. His robe creates music, and he creates new life.

The poet says he was brought to life and his crying turned to laughter. Love turned him fierce and tender, but his teacher told him he wasn't wild enough. He became joyous, and then died, and then became a fool, and then became scattered smoke. He wanted his teacher's wings to fly. Then the student felt love and became the shadow cast by the light of the teacher. The light of the teacher would transform the world, and bodies would become light. The poet asks you to imagine returning to whence you came and being greeted with wine. The soul, he says, is the shape of a bowl.

The poet asks Shams and the sun to help him, since he is partly within himself and partly outside himself. The prior day at sunrise, his friend asked how long they will remain unconscious, filled with love's pain instead of its fulfillment. The poet replied that he was a candle, and his friend was the whole night, too much darkness. The friend asked if a drop stayed still in the ocean and told the poet to move with the whole of the ocean and the smallest part.

The poet warns not to merely parrot one's teacher. He tells the story of Zuleikha, who loved Joseph, and so Joseph became everything to her. Every daily joy was really Joseph's touch, and every daily grief was really his absence. She was united with Joseph. The poet says that the self is emptied and filled with love.

I Have Such a Teacher Analysis

In Rumi's writing, the idea of teacher and friend and beloved is bound up with the idea of God. The teacher is enlightened and so is a part of a greater whole, an ocean of spirituality of which the individual is merely a drop, a great light of which the student is only a shadow. The teacher is opened up to this larger self, this communion of humanity, and so the teacher is a pathway to God, which lives inside everyone. The old

man in the garden is such a teacher, and the garden again represents the spiritual plane beyond the physical one.

The idea of having and wanting nothing is part of Rumi's conception of the value of the spiritual plane and the worth of spirituality, beyond anything physical. The physical only holds one back from the more valuable spiritual. Rumi's metaphor of being naked represents casting off the physical world completely, and in return, one is clothed with something more vast and amazing than what one has cast off. The reason Rumi describes the soul as the shape of a bowl is because he sees the soul as there to be filled up from the well of spirituality that is opened by enlightenment.

The difficulty of the student is not merely being in the shadow of the teacher's greater spirituality but in trying to find his or her own way to enlightenment. The student cannot travel the same path as the teacher or imitate the teacher. The student has to go on an inner journey, so the journey can't be identical to the teacher's. Similarly, the student cannot consider the teacher to be the same as God, to be the whole of the great spirituality the student seeks. That is the point of Zuleika's story, where she sees Joseph in everything. The student must look beyond the teacher and find the greatness of spirituality within the self. Finding the transformative journey is the student's task.

We Have Opened You

We Have Opened You Summary

In Barks's commentary, he notes the framed, window-like images in the book, saying that the following poem celebrates openings, where true human beings visit space created through breaking one's self down. Rumi, he notes, describes this as spring and a feeling of being outside time. Barks says Rumi's poems celebrate this opened inner space and notes that one of the poems, which repeats the word "this," was intended for the end of a vigil. Rumi spoke of an indescribable place of pure being.

Rumi's poem begins by describing a window from one heart to another, but the poem says the window can be closed. Sometimes it should be closed, the poet says, and sometimes open, but it is essential to know of the window. He talks about David working as a metalworker, making new shapes out of locks and chains. The poet talks of being cooped up in his room and of someone who brings him food and forgives him.

The poet describes the springtime and sharing with another the words, "My Life Is Not Mine." The experience the poet describes is drinking wine, but not with the lips and sleeping, not in bed. He says to give up wanting what others have and says that the day is a self-aware day: love, nourishment, and gentleness beyond anything imaginable.

The poet compares himself to a rose hip, stripped of petals and leaves. He describes a field, beyond right and wrong, where the soul goes and loses ideas and language. He describes love as many beings in one come to his heart, like a thousand wheat plants in one grain. Barks inserts a note of commentary, describing Rumi and Shams playing chess. Just when Rumi realizes he has lost, Shams says Rumi has won, and the friendship becomes deeper.

Rumi's poem describes being struck by lightning and a central core of love with no edges. He says if there is no wall between two minds, no window is needed. He describes a force giving us wings and making hurt disappear. He describes a cup filled with emptiness, which brings peace and is what the soul wants.

The poet uses the word "this" repeatedly to describe something indescribable: not imagination, grief, joy, judging, happiness, or sadness, which are transient. It is a presence, a down, and a truth, and the Friend. He describes it as what's missing in wine, what the night sky begs for, and what created the body and the universe. The poet says throughout his life that the flow toward him has been constant and that everything is for the Host.

The poet describes himself as dust in sunlight, as morning mist and evening's breath, as wind and surf, and the parts of a ship as well as the reef. He describes himself as a tree and the parrot in it, as flute music, a spark, a candle and the moth drawn to the flame,

and a rose and a bird drawn to its odor. The poet describes himself as everything that is and isn't, the rhythm of the universe, and the one in all.

The poet describes souls dancing, saying we are the mirror and the reflected face, the jug and the face reflected in the water pouring out. He describes a love surrounding nothingness and the lover as everything within the horizon.

We Have Opened You Analysis

The window from one heart to another is a metaphor for the entryway into a place of spirituality or spiritual communion, where the self enters into a union with all things. Rumi refers often to being "opened." This opening is a way into a new world and a way to see beyond the blinders of normal human existence (or, according to another of Rumi's metaphors, a way to stop being the cow that only sees watermelon rinds and not the grandness of the city). A person is opened to a new dimension, where the world of the spiritual can be entered and experienced.

Rumi so often uses metaphors because the spiritual world is not within the realm of normal human existence, and so it is indescribable. The repetition of "this" is a device to refer to the indescribable that must be described. The "emptiness" that Rumi refers to as filling a cup and filling the soul is a lack of the physical. It is empty because there is no physical component, but in its emptiness, it is full. The spiritual comes into focus where the physical is lacking, almost as if the physical precludes and prevents the spiritual. In this nothingness, the emptiness of the spiritual, there is an "everythingness" as well. The soul, once it joins in the spiritual ocean, is part of everything, which is why Rumi describes himself as both the ship and the reef, the candle and the moth.

Come Back, My Friend

Come Back, My Friend Summary

"Come Back, My Friend" begins with a poem, talking about the many times the poet lost the connection with his loved one. He talks about the fragrance bringing him back, starting a cycle of broken promises. Though the poet tries to think and read to find his lover again, there is no help in it. Barks's commentary says that Rumi was asked why, since he valued silence, he wrote so much. He replied that no words came from the radiance inside him. Barks compares humans talking about God to fish talking about the sea. Barks asks the reader to try to be in the state of spirituality instead of reading about it, to live the connection about which Rumi talks.

In the following poem, the poet asks what caused a candle to open and consume him. He calls out for his love's return and to re-live their union. The poet says not to grieve because all losses return to us and God's love flows to everything and is in everything. The poet says he has nothing; he is only talking about what he does not have. He begs to be dissolved.

The poet states that words don't prepare us for the journey we all make. He again compares his soul to a drop in a spiritual ocean, saying that it is always autumn inside the human soul. He calls out to a higher being to return springtime. The poet says that Joseph is returned but asks the reader to be Jacob, if not Joseph. He refers to Jesus dying to return again to life. He asks the reader to crumble, so wildflowers can sprout in the Earth. The poet says that praying must be constant and compares us to fish who need constant water. He asks whether the reader visits himself regularly, and then says not to answer but to reply in dying.

Come Back, My Friend Analysis

"Come Back, My Friend" is about loss. In Rumi's spiritual world view, nothing is ever truly lost. Nothing goes away; it is merely transformed. Rumi eternally seeks the world of the spiritual and speaks as one who loses it over and over and must search for it again. The world of the spiritual is not accessible through study or reading, Rumi reminds the reader once more. It is only accessible through the spiritual journey.

When the poet begs to be dissolved, he is begging to lose his normal self and enter into the communion with the larger, spiritual whole. Rumi returns to the metaphor of the drop in the ocean. The whole is made up of the parts, and the parts are in and of the whole. The drop is the soul, and the whole is God or spiritual communion, or all things. When Rumi asks the reader to be Jacob if he cannot be Joseph, Joseph represents the enlightened state, the teacher, and the ocean of spirituality. Jacob is the blind man who is given sight by Joseph; he is the person who is opened to spiritual discovery by the teacher. Rumi is asking the reader to be opened to spiritual discovery.

Rumi again returns to the metaphor of the physical person being broken down, like soil, so that something may be planted, when he asks the reader to crumble so that wildflowers can sprout. The self needs to be broken down before spiritual enlightenment can begin.

Conclusion, Into the Soup

Conclusion, Into the Soup Summary

Barks says some say Rumi is to Persian as Shakespeare is to English, but Barks says Rumi is bigger than just a nationality. Barks is hesitant to put meaning to Rumi's words but says that part of the philosophy is that God is man and man is God. He sees Rumi as celebrating kinship with the soul. He introduces Rumi's next poem, which uses a metaphor of a chickpea and a cook.

In the poem, the chickpea leaps up and asks the cook why it's being boiled, but the cook puts it down into the water saying he's making something great out of the chickpea. The chickpea will become part of the cook. In the metaphor, the human soul suffers torture but only to transform into something great and become one with something greater. In the poem, the cook is a teacher, who once was a chickpea like the student.

In another poem, Rumi talks about red, the red of the blushing modesty of a lover and compares its beauty to a rose garden, the stove, mountains in the sunset, and rubies beneath the mountain. The final poem says that if the beloved is seen in everything, the lover is a hindrance. Living must become the beloved, the Friend, and then the lovers cease to exist. The book ends with Rumi's call to let the soul speak through the face.

Conclusion, Into the Soup Analysis

Barks chooses to end the book with three poems. The first is a metaphor about the student and teacher or about the religious seeker and the enlightened being above him. This is the same relationship that Rumi keeps coming back to, of the lover and the beloved; the self and the Friend; the drop and the ocean; the ruby and the sunlight. In this metaphor, Rumi focuses on the trials of transformation, comparing them to the experience of a chickpea being boiled. All the troubles and sorrows of life are preparing the self for a higher purpose and to become something wonderful.

The next poem Barks chooses is a short poem about a blushing lover's modesty. The poem is sweet and simple, comparing the red blush of the lover's face to roses and rubies, and all the red things in the world. This is at its core a love poem, but love is always a spiritual thing to Rumi. Finally, Barks ends the book with a poem that expands the idea of the beloved, the Friend, to be living. Like much of Rumi's writing about spirituality, this poem is about the extinction of the self, the ceasing of the lovers to be distinct. Only when the self is extinguished can a new spiritual place beyond the material be found.

Characters

Jelaluddin Rumiappears in All Sections

Rumi is the poet and writer. He becomes a character in two ways. First, Barks's commentary is an integral part of the book, and his commentary is often biographical about Rumi as a person and a spiritual leader. Rumi was a spiritual teacher, and through his relationship with Shams, a wandering dervish, Rumi developed his own spirituality. After Shams's death, Rumi traveled the world and also became a poet, writing the works in Barks's book, which often referred to Shams.

Second, Rumi is a character in his own poems. The poet is a spiritual teacher, and the poems are his teachings. Rumi is also the spiritual journeyer, trying to find his own place of enlightenment. Rumi talks directly to the reader, imploring the reader to go on a personal spiritual journey, as Rumi has, in order to find enlightenment. Rumi believes the soul comes from an unknown place, someplace where it was part of a larger whole. This larger whole is God. He compares it to a reed cut from a bed of reeds. The reed longs for the whole it once knew, and Rumi believes the soul longs for the whole it once knew. He tells the reader that prayer is an expression of that longing. Rumi believes that through tearing down the self and rejecting the material, physical, and intellectual world, a person can find enlightenment.

To Rumi, enlightenment and love are the same thing. It is a joining together, an intertwining of souls that leaves behind the world and exists only in a world of spirituality. The lover and beloved cease to exist as they lose themselves in something greater than themselves.

Shams of Tabriz/The Friend/The Beloved/The Teacherappears in All Sections

Shams of Tabriz was a wandering dervish, poor and uneducated. He met Rumi by accident in a Turkish cosmopolitan city, filled with people of many religions and background. Shams was to Rumi a true friend, a true human being, and a teacher. Shams caught Rumi's attention by asking him a religious question: who was greater, Muhammed or Bestami? Rumi's religious teachings said that Muhammed was greater, but Shams pointed out that while Muhammed said God was much greater than he, Bestami said that he was one with God. Rumi's answer was that Bestami saw only a small portion of God and thought it was the whole of the spiritual glory. This greater, overwhelmingly-great God that an enlightened person is but one part of, but still one with, is a motif that emerges again and again in Rumi's poetry, as he compares the relationship of a person to God with the relationship of a water drop to the ocean.

Rumi and Shams spent much time together, but according to Barks, Shams was disliked by many of Rumi's followers. Shams was forced out of the city again and again,

but Rumi always brought him back. Finally, Shams was killed, and Rumi wandered the world looking for him. Shams's name means the sun, and Rumi refers to Shams several times throughout his poetry. The sun is a metaphor for the enlightened beloved, and so Shams's name takes on a double meaning. Shams is the Friend and the beloved of Rumi.

Muhammadappears in Who Are These Two?

Muhammad is the messenger of God and the religious leader that Rumi follows. When Rumi first meets Shams, Shams asks who is greater, Muhammad or Bestami, another religious leader. The traditional answer to this question according to Rumi's religion is Muhammad. However, Muhammad taught that he only saw a small portion of God, knowledge, and glory. Bestami said that he was God. Rumi sees the depth of Shams's question which is why the two become lifelong friends. Rumi also has an answer to the question. Rumi believes that Bestami only saw a small part of God and believed it was the whole thing, while Muhammad realized that what he was seeing was only a small piece of the vast spirituality of God.

Bestamiappears in Who Are These Two?

Bestami was a mystic who claimed to be one with God. When Rumi first meets Shams, Shams asks who is greater, Muhammed or Bestami, another religious leader. The traditional answer to this question according to Rumi's religion is Muhammad . However, Muhammad taught that he only saw a small portion of God, knowledge, and glory. Bestami said that he was God. Rumi sees the depth of Shams's question, and this is why the two become lifelong friends. Rumi also has an answer to the question. Rumi believes that Bestami only saw a small part of God and believed it was the whole thing, while Muhammad realized that what he was seeing was only a small piece of the vast spirituality of God.

Josephappears in The Whole Catastrophe, The Path of Blame, Come Back, My Frie

Rumi refers to the biblical character Joseph in his poems. Barks tells the story of Joseph so that the reader can better understand the allusions in Rumi's poetry. Joseph is the son of Jacob, and his brothers are jealous of their father's favorite son. Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers. The brothers come back to Jacob with their brother's shirt, which they have covered in blood, and tell their father that Joseph has been killed by wild animals to cover up what they've done, and so that their father won't search for Joseph. This story echoes back to Rumi's disbelief at the reports of the death of Shams, which Barks talks about in his commentary.

Rumi's references to Joseph do not only include the biblical stories, but also stories from Rumi's religious tradition. In these stories, Jacob grows old and blind in the

absence of his son. Joseph sends his shirt, a symbol of love because it lays over the heart, to his father. The shirt of his son and the knowledge that his son is alive opens Jacob's eyes. In "The Path of Blame," Rumi mentions Joseph's journey to Egypt as representing the hard road to spiritual enlightenment.

Jacobappears in The Whole Catastrophe, Come Back, My Friend

Jacob is Joseph's father, who goes blind in his old age. According to legends that Rumi refers to, Joseph's shirt was laid over his father's eyes to cure his blindness. The poet asks the reader that if he cannot be the enlightened Joseph, he should be Jacob who loves Joseph and is cured by him.

Zuleikhaappears in The Whole Catastrophe, I Have Such a Teacher

Zuleikha is an Egyptian woman who is in love with Joseph. Zuleika tugs on Joseph's shirt, emphasizing the shirt as a symbol of love, since it lies over the heart. Rumi talks about Zuleika as seeing Joseph in everything, focused on him by his love.

Abrahamappears in Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey

Abraham is a prophet and religious figure. Rumi refers to Abraham wearing fire as one of the amazing accomplishments of a spiritual journey.

Mosesappears in Who Are These Two?, Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Jo

Moses is a prophet and a religious leader from the Old Testament. Rumi refers to Moses going to get fire and finding something that burns in the sunset as a way that prophets doing everyday things unexpectedly find spiritual answers. Rumi also refers to Moses talking to the sea, a reference to parting the Red Sea, as one of the amazing accomplishments of a spiritual journey. Rumi also mentions Moses's journey through the wilderness as a hard road toward enlightenment in "The Path of Blame."

Solomonappears in Who Are These Two?, Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Jo

Solomon is a prophet and religious figure. Rumi refers to Solomon finding a gold ring inside a fish as a way that prophets doing everyday things unexpectedly find spiritual

answers, and he also refers to Solomon riding the wind as one of the amazing accomplishments of a spiritual journey.

Jesusappears in Who Are These Two?, Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Jo

Rumi refers to the religious leader of Christianity, Jesus. He mentions Jesus finding a door to another world as he flees his enemies as a way that prophets doing everyday things unexpectedly find spiritual answers. Rumi also says that Jesus was miraculous for himself and not for anything he did for the future. In his poem on fasting in "There Is a Breathing," Rumi also says that one who fasts will find something greater awaiting on Jesus's table. Rumi also refers to Jesus's dying and returning to life in "Come Back, My Friend."

Ramakrishnaappears in Come to the Orchard

Ramakrishna is a spiritual leader mentioned by Barks. Barks tells the story of a man telling Ramakrishna that he wants to bring his cousin to see the leader, but the cousin is reluctant. Ramakrishna tells the man to say to his cousin that they have fish soup, to entice the cousin to spiritual exploration through fulfillment of his everyday needs. Barks mentions this story in relation to how Rumi uses images of the everyday in his spiritual poems.

Loversappears in There Is a Breathing

In "A daily practice" in "There Is a Breathing," Rumi describes two lovers. The woman asks the man who he loves more, her or himself. The man describes himself as a ruby only reflecting the woman's sunlight. Rumi applies this metaphor to the relationship between man's soul and God, that humans are merely a reflection of a greater beauty.

The Man Who Prays to Allahappears in The Path of Blame

The man who prays to Allah calls out to Allah, but gets no reply. After being criticized by a cynic, the man stops praying. Then, he has a dream, and in his dream he receives the message that his prayer is not to get an outward response but instead to express his own longing for the spiritual world from which his soul has been wrenched.

The Cynicappears in The Path of Blame

The cynic criticizes the man who prays to Allah for continuing to pray, even though he does not get a response.

Bawa Muhaiyaddeenappears in I Have Such a Teacher

Bawa Muhaiyaddeen was the spiritual teacher of the book's commentator/translator Coleman Barks and its illustrator Michael Green. Barks discusses the Sufi Bawa in his commentary, noting his teaching in Sri Lanka and in Philadelphia before his death in 1986. Barks says Bawa encouraged Barks and Green to create this book to bring Rumi to the Western world and also that Bawa taught Barks and Green to appreciate Rumi.

The Chickpeaappears in Conclusion, Into the Soup

The chickpea is being cooked in a pot in Rumi's poem. It protests to the cook, asking why it's being boiled. The chickpea is a metaphor for an unenlightened human being on a journey for spiritual truth. It is undergoing suffering and cannot welcome it (as Rumi elsewhere asks the reader to welcome all visiting emotions, even sorrow and suffering). The cook pushes the chickpea down into the pot, telling the chickpea that it is being prepared. The chickpea is in fact being transformed through its suffering and learns to plead with the cook to boil it because it cannot boil itself. From reluctance, the chickpea moves to eagerness in its transformation.

Ultimately, the chickpea will be changed through boiling into something new, a spiritual transformation. It will be seasoned and become a work of art. Then, it will be eaten. In the process of being eaten, the chickpea will become a part of something that is greater than itself. This is the process of the chickpea achieving enlightenment, and joining with a spirituality beyond itself and beings beyond its imagination.

The Cookappears in Conclusion, Into the Soup

The cook in Rumi's poem is a teacher and also a representative of God. The cook is boiling a chickpea on the stove, but the chickpea is reluctant and wants to know why. The cook explains that he used to be a chickpea, like his student. He pushes the chickpea into the pot and asks the chickpea to accept transformation, so that ultimately the chickpea can achieve a greater enlightenment.

Objects/Places

Oysterappears in Who Are These Two?

Rumi uses a metaphor of an oyster who drinks and creates a pearl to show how the wondrous can come unexpectedly from the everyday.

Joseph's Shirtappears in The Whole Catastrophe

Joseph sends his shirt to his blinded father Jacob, and laying Joseph's shirt over his father's blind eyes cures Jacob's blindness.

The Golden Bowlappears in Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey

Rumi writes that a human being not doing spiritual work is wasting his valuable soul, like a man who uses a golden bowl to cook turnips.

The Valuable Daggerappears in Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey

Rumi writes that a human being not doing spiritual work is wasting his valuable soul, like a man who uses a valuable dagger as a peg in the wall.

The Worm Addicted to Grape Leavesappears in Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey

Rumi uses the worm as a metaphor for how human beings can change through a spiritual journey. The worm is addicted to grape leaves, until he wakes to discover that he is now what he has been consuming. The worm is the vineyard and everything in it.

The Reedappears in Rise Up Nimbly and Go on Your Strange Journey

Rumi uses the reed as a metaphor for the human soul. The reed is cut from the reed bed, just as the spirit is cut from the spiritual state of communion that Rumi envisions as God. The reed becomes a flute, bringing joy to humanity while always crying out for its home.

Baby Pigeonappears in Come to the Orchard

Rumi uses a metaphor of a baby pigeon in a nest hearing a whistle and being urged to fly. The baby pigeon is a metaphor for a human being waiting to go on a spiritual journey. The poet is urging the reader to take a first step.

The Orchard/Gardenappears in Come to the Orchard, There Is a Breathing, I Would Love to K

The orchard or garden appears throughout Rumi's poetry as a metaphor for a spiritual place of communion beyond the ordinary world.

The Windowappears in We Have Opened You

Rumi talks about a window from one heart to another that can be opened to create a spiritual communion and let another being into one's heart.

A Drop in an Oceanappears in We Have Opened You, Come Back, My Friend

Rumi uses the metaphor of a drop in an ocean to describe the relationship of the self to God (or the larger, spiritual communion of beings). The self is the drop, and it is in and of the ocean, moving along with the greater ocean.

The Houseappears in I Would Love to Kiss You

Rumi uses the house as a metaphor for the traditional self that a person has developed in his or her lifetime. Rumi says that a person must tear down his house to find the valuable jewel hidden beneath, the true soul.

The Silkwormappears in The Path of Blame

Rumi uses the silkworm as a metaphor for the spiritual journey a person takes. The silkworm goes inside its cocoon to transform, just as a human must travel inside his own soul to transform.

Rubiesappears in There Is a Breathing, Conclusion, Into the Soup

Rumi uses rubies to represent the lover who glows in the light of the beloved. Rubies do not shine their own light, but reflect the light of another, which is often the red light of dawn.

Themes

The Spiritual Journey

Rumi implores the reader to go on a spiritual journey. Enlightenment cannot be gained by reading or studying. Enlightenment can only be gained by going on one's own journey into the self and discovering the truth in one's own soul. The reward for this journey is of immense value and brings the joining of the soul with other beings in a place of pure spirituality outside the world. This spiritual place is a place of love; however, the journey itself is long and difficult.

The self must be torn down to complete the spiritual journey. Rumi compares it to tilling the soil so plants may grow. He also compares it to tearing down a house to find the gem that is buried underneath, a gem whose worth is that of many, many houses. Rumi believes the real work of human beings on Earth is this spiritual journey to uncover enlightenment and says that a human being who is not focusing on a spiritual journey is wasting himself. Rumi compares it to using a valuable knife as a hook to hang things on in the kitchen.

The spiritual journey cannot be fulfilled by merely following a teacher. Rumi warns not to merely reiterate what a teacher has told you. He even cautions the reader not to read on, but to set down the book and go out on a journey. The spiritual journey can only be accomplished by doing and being, not by reading or studying.

Being in the Now

Rumi says at one point that Jesus is not about thinking of the future or affecting and changing the future. He comments that he could worship someone who forgot the future and implores the reader to forget the future. Rumi believes in existing in the present. The destination of the journey is not what's important. What's important is beginning the journey now, putting one foot in front of the other and being on the journey.

Rumi believes in being in the now and experiencing the present. Being concerned about the past or the future implies being concerned about the human, material world. The reason Rumi does not believe in reading or study as a path to enlightenment is because reading and study make a connection with the past and with the physical human world. Being in the now means disconnecting from the past and the future and even disconnecting from the world around you. The connection that Rumi is searching for is not with things around you, but with things within you.

Rumi describes doing spiritual work to go on a journey to enlightenment. This work is about focusing the mind and the self on the moment and on simply being. He advocates breathing as focusing on the now and on being and advocates fasting in the same way. When he talks about emptiness, he is talking about being in the moment and letting all things outside of the self, in the past or future, go away.

God

Rumi's poetry is about spirituality. Though Rumi seldom mentions God, God is at the heart of Rumi's spiritual journey. Rumi's God is not merely a single being, but an all-encompassing spiritual place, which human beings can become part of and which is the human soul's home. When Rumi talks of a reed being pulled from the bed of reeds and becoming a flute, always yearning for the red bed from whence it came, Rumi is talking of the soul being wrenched from its spiritual home, the origin of all souls. Rumi says that he doesn't know what his soul is or where it came from but knows that the soul came from someplace else and longs to be back there.

Rumi tells a story about a prayer to Allah, and a cynic who condemns the person who prays, since the prayer never receives an answer. The resolution of the story is that the answer does not come from outside the one who prays. Instead, the prayer is an expression of the longing of the one who prays. The prayer itself is its own reward and meaning. The longing Rumi is describing is a longing for the origin, the reed bed where human souls began and where they will one day return.

The reed bed is God, and God is encompassing and enfolding. In the poem where Rumi repeats that "this" is not imagination, and "this" is what is missing in wine, this is what the night sky begs for—Rumi is referring to God, the condition of oneness that is outside of the world. It is "empty" because it does not contain any material things. It is not of the body, but only of the soul. Only in this emptiness, a giving up of all mortal, worldly things, is the soul filled with spiritual truth and communion.

Style

Point of View

Rumi's poems are often written in the first person, from the poet's point of view, and they often talk directly to both the reader and to a mysterious "you" that is an enlightened spiritual being, the Friend, that brings total love and the spiritual journey. When Rumi talks to the reader, he implores the reader to begin a spiritual journey. Rumi asks the reader to stop reading but instead to be and do, even if the reader has no idea how to start on this journey of being and doing. Rumi believes that true spirituality cannot be understood by reading or studying but by looking inside one's self and tearing down the outer trappings of being a human.

When Rumi talks to his Friend, he speaks as a worshiper as well as a lover. He is the shadow cast by the sunlight and the ruby that has lost its gleam by being absorbed into the brilliant light of the dawn. Rumi sees himself as something small and insignificant next to the glory of the higher power (Friend, lover, and God) to whom he cries out. He also sees himself as being one and part of that higher power. Only in losing one's self can one become a spiritual being in communion with (and therefore the same as) a being so great. Rumi describes it as being a drop in the ocean. The drop is minuscule in comparison to the whole ocean, but it is also in and of the ocean.

Setting

Rumi's poetry does not tell stories in any traditional sense, except to illustrate spiritual lessons. It does not have traditional settings or characters. Instead, the primary character and setting of Rumi's poetry is the human soul. The soul is an orphan in Rumi's poetry, pulled away from the place it began and stranded in the world of human existence. As a setting, this world is a cold, difficult, and indecipherable place where the human soul experiences pain and longing for the spiritual world from which it's been ripped away.

The world that the soul longs for is one of complete communion and nothingness. As an empty place, this spiritual world is difficult to describe. Rumi sometimes uses the metaphor of an orchard or garden in springtime to describe it, but Rumi also makes it clear that this place is outside of all human existence. All the things of the world are left behind there. It contains no want or desire, and it contains nothing to have. It is a place of poverty, but in its poverty there is wealth.

Physical reality is meaningless in Rumi's poetry, except as a metaphor for spiritual ideas. The dawn is not a time of day; it is a metaphor for being engulfed in the light of a spiritual being. A silkworm is not an insect, but a metaphor for a spiritual journey into the cocoon of the self. A house is not a house, but a metaphor for the body that must be torn down to connect with the spiritual self.

Language and Meaning

Rumi's poetry is heavily reliant on metaphor. Often, Rumi is attempting to communicate spiritual ideas that aren't easily communicated in everyday language, and he creates metaphors to deliver his meanings. One of the major metaphors in Rumi's poetry is the garden or orchard, which is associated with drinking wine, often without a cup or without the lips. The garden is a spiritual place, related to rebirth and springtime. It is also a place outside the world, where worldly cares do not exist. The wine of the orchard is a spiritual drink, which is why it can be drunk without cup or lips. Rumi refers to the state of drunkenness as the spiritual state experienced by human beings who are disoriented from being away from their spiritual origin.

Rumi discusses being opened. The opening is also a metaphoric opening, sometimes through a window or door. The human soul is encased in a body, and so it is closed off from a spiritual existence. Opening allows a human being to become one with other beings, in a spiritual communion that Rumi associates with love. Love and God are one in the same and are associated with the Friend, or teacher.

Rumi also uses many allusions to stories of spiritual figures. These stories often are related to the spiritual journey Rumi asks the reader to follow. He talks about Joseph, who was banished to slavery in Egypt but rose to great heights in his new land. Joseph's hardships led to spiritual awakenings. Rumi also mentions Moses's journey into the desert as another hardship. He also alludes to Shams, his friend and teacher, using the double meaning of Shams' name and the sun, the source of life, which is another metaphor for God and spirituality.

Structure

The book is divided into ten sections, which contain both commentary by Barks and poetry by Rumi. Each page is illustrated by Michael Green. Rumi's poetry is laid out to emphasize words and phrases. Since the poetry is not only translated into English but also visually styled and illustrated, it is a highly interpretive presentation of Rumi's work, filtered through Barks's and Green's understanding of Rumi's poetry.

The book begins with an introduction to Rumi and Shams, including biographical information about the poet that informs Barks's understanding of Rumi's poetry. The poems reveal Rumi's ideas about a spiritual journey to a deeper understanding and enlightenment, which includes tearing down the being to open up a new world behind the old. The book alternates between pages of light working with heavy illustration, which pulls from many different spiritual backgrounds, and pages of poetry with few illustrations. This gives the poems themselves an ebb and flow of longer passages mixed with short, heavily-emphasized passages.

The book seldom delineates between individual poems, and the poems run together throughout a chapter, not as separate small works, but as a larger work. The translated poems do not utilize rhyme or meter; however, line length, divisions of stanzas, and the

layout of the poems on the page contribute to their meaning. The line length is generally short, and the poet often works in short stanzas that deliver a kernel of wisdom, often heavily reliant on metaphor. As Barks and Green have laid out the poems, sometimes they create visual shapes, such as circular passages, or words that visually drip into the illustrations.

Quotes

"Unfold your own myth, / without complicated explanation, / so everyone will understand / the passage, / we have opened you / Start walking toward Shams." —"Who Are These Two?" page 11

"You sit here for days saying, This is strange business. You're the strange business. You have the energy of the sun in you, but you keep knotting it up at the base of your spine." —"The Whole Catastrophe," page 17

"The miracle of Jesus is himself, not / what he said or did / about the future. Forget the future. / I'd worship someone who could do that!" —"Rise Up Nimbly and Go On Your Strange Journey," page 26

"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." —"Come to the Orchard," page 31

"Work. Keep digging your well, / Don't think about getting off from work. / Water is there somewhere." —"There Is a Breathing," page 45

"I would love to kiss you / The price of kissing is your life. / Now my loving is running toward my life shouting / What a bargain! Let's buy it." —"I Would Love to Kiss You," pages 56-57

"Tear down this house. / A hundred thousand new houses can be built / from the transparent yellow carnelian buried beneath / and the only way to get to that / is to do the work of demolishing and then /digging under the foundation." —"I Would Love to Kiss You," page 69

"Welcome and attend them all! / Even if they're 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 Path of Blame," page 77

"When she's hungry, it's for him. Thirsty, his name is a sherbet. / Cold, he's a fur. This is what the Friend can do / when one is in such love." —"I Have Such a Teacher," page 92

"Out beyond ideas of / wrong-doing & right-doing / 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." —"We Have Opened You," page 98

"When grapes turn to wine, / they're wanting / this. / When the nightsky pours by, / it's really a crowd of beggars, / and they all want some of this!" —"We Have Opened You," page 106

"Don't grieve. / Anything you lose comes round / in another form. / The child weaned from mother's milk / now drinks wine and honey mixed." —"Come Back, My Friend" page 118

Topics for Discussion

What is Rumi's conception of God?

Who does Rumi mean when he refers to the Friend?

In Rumi's poetry, what does it mean to be "opened"?

How does Rumi use metaphors to describe aspects of spirituality that can't be described directly?

How does Rumi use the metaphors of the garden or orchard, the ocean, and the sun in his poetry?

How does Rumi use images of everyday life in his poetry about spirituality?

What is Rumi's idea of the spiritual journey he believes all people should take? What does the journeyer need to sacrifice?

How does Rumi view the physical world? How should the physical world be treated for a spiritual journeyer?