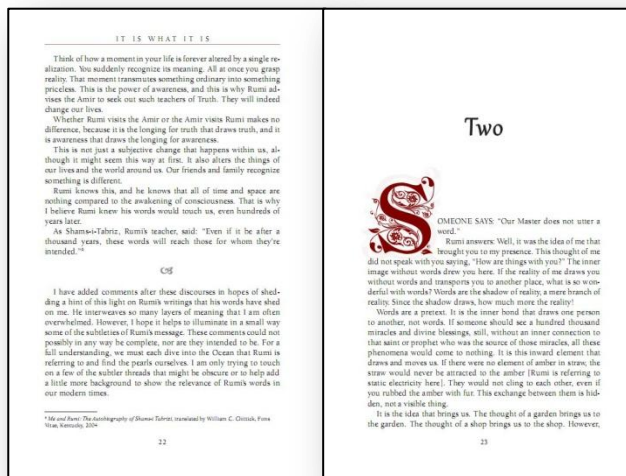


It Is What It Is: The Personal Discourses of Rumi

By Doug Marman

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Discourse Two



Someone says: "Our Master does not utter a word."

Rumi answers: Well, it was the idea of me that brought you to my presence. This thought of me did not speak with you saying, "How are things with you?" The inner image without words drew you here. If the reality of me draws you without

words and transports you to another place, what is so wonderful with words? Words are the shadow of reality, a mere branch of reality. Since the shadow draws, how much more the reality!

Words are a pretext. It is the inner bond that draws one person to another, not words. If someone should see a hundred thousand miracles and divine blessings, still, without an inner connection to that saint or prophet who was the source of those miracles, all these phenomena would come to nothing. It is this inward element that draws and moves us. If there were no element of amber in straw, the straw would never be attracted to the amber [Rumi is referring to static electricity here]. They would not cling to each other, even if you rubbed the amber with fur. This exchange between them is hidden, not a visible thing.

It is the idea that brings us. The thought of a garden brings us to the garden. The thought of a shop brings us to the shop. However, within these thoughts is a secret deception. Have you never gone to a certain place thinking it would be good, only to find disappointment? These ideas then are like a shroud, and within that shroud someone is hidden. The day reality draws you and the shroud of thought disappears, there will be no disappointment. Then you will see reality as it is, and nothing more.

"Upon that day when the secrets are tried."

So, what reason is there for me to speak? In reality that which draws is a single thing, but it appears to be many. We are possessed by a hundred different desires. "I want vermicelli," we say. "I want ravioli. I want halvah. I want fritters. I want fruit. I want dates." We name these one by one, but the root of the matter is a single thing: the root is hunger. Don't you see how, once we have our fill of but one thing, we say, "Nothing else is necessary?" Therefore, it was not ten or a hundred things, but one thing that drew us.

"And their number We have appointed only as a trial."

The many things of this world are a trial appointed by God, for they hide the single reality. There is a saying that the saint is one, humankind is a hundred, meaning the saint's whole attention remains upon the one truth, while people are scattered over a hundred appearances. But which hundred? Which fifty? Which sixty? Lost in this world of mirrored reflections, they are a faceless people without hands and feet, without mind and Soul, quivering like a magic talisman, like quicksilver or mercury. They do not know who they are. Call them sixty or a hundred or a thousand, and the saint is one, but is not this view a trial itself? For the truth is that the hundreds are nothing, while the saint is a thousand, and a hundred thousand, and thousands of thousands.

A king once gave a single soldier the rations for a hundred men. The army protested, but the king said nothing. When the day of battle arrived, all the men fled the field, except that one soldier who fought alone. "There you are," the king said. "It was for this I fed one man as a hundred."

It behooves us to strip away all our prejudices and seek out a friend of God. However, when we spend our whole life in the company of people who lack discrimination, then our own discriminative faculty becomes weak, and that true friend may pass us by unrecognized.

Discrimination is a quality that is always hidden in a person. Don't you see that a madman possesses hands and feet but lacks common sense? The ability to recognize truth is a subtle essence within you. Yet, day and night you are occupied with nurturing this physical form that doesn't know right from wrong. You make the false claim: That inner reality exists because of this. Why do you care so much for this physical and forget that? The physical exists because of that, but that in no way depends on this.

The light that shines through the windows of the eyes and ears—if these windows did not exist, that light would not stop. It would find

other windows to shine through. If you bring a lamp before the sun, do you say, "I see the sun by means of this lamp"? God forbid! If you did not bring the lamp, the sun would still shine. What need is there for a lamp?

Never break off the hope for God. Hope is the secret of the path to security. Even if you don't walk this road, remember the secret of hope. Don't say, "I've committed many wrongs." Don't hold yourself back. Turn to rightness and leave those wrongs behind. Be true like the straight rod of Moses when he faced the Pharaoh's magicians. They turned their sticks into deadly snakes, but his rod swallowed up those clever tricks. If you've done wrong, don't give up hope, since you've only done it to yourself. How could anything you do ever hurt God?

*A bird lands on a mountain,
Then flies away –
Tell me, what was added to that mountain?
What was lost?*

Once you become true, wrongness disappears. Know this! Don't give up hope.

The danger in associating with kings is not that you may lose your life. We must lose our life in the end anyway, whether today or tomorrow does not matter. The danger arises from the fact that when kings enter upon the scene and the spell of their influence gains strength, becoming like a great lamp, the person who keeps company with them, claims their friendship, and accepts money from them will inevitably speak in accordance with their desires. That person will listen to the kings' mundane views with the utmost attention and will not be able to deny them.

That is where the danger lies; it leads to a fading respect for the true light. When you cultivate the interest of kings, that other interest which is fundamental to the spiritual life becomes a stranger to you. The

more you proceed down the path of kings, the more that direction where the Beloved dwells becomes lost. The more you make your peace with worldly people, the more the Beloved turns away from you. Going in their direction renders you subject to their rule. Once you have turned down their path, in the end God gives them power over you.

It is a pity to reach the ocean and to be satisfied with a little pitcher-full from the sea. After all, there are pearls in the sea, and from the sea come a myriad of precious things. What is the value in just taking water? What pride can intelligent people have in that? This world is a mere foam fleck of the True Sea. That Ocean is the science of the saints, and within that Water is the Pearl Itself.

This world is but foam full of flotsam. Yet, through the turning of the waves and the rhythmic surging of the sea in constant motion, this foam takes on a certain beauty. But this beauty is a borrowed thing coming from elsewhere. It is a false coin that sparkles to the eye.

People are the astrolabe of God, but it requires an astronomer to use the astrolabe. If a vegetable-seller or a greengrocer should find the astrolabe, what good would it do them? From that astrolabe, what could they know of the movements of the circling stars and the positions of the planets, their influences and so forth? But in the hands of the astronomer, the astrolabe becomes truly valuable.

“Those who know themselves know God.”

Just as this copper astrolabe reflects the movements of the heavens like a mirror, so the human being is the astrolabe of God.

“We have honored the children of Adam.”

Those who are moved by God to see the one reality and learn Its ways through the astrolabe of their own being, behold moment by

moment, flash by flash, the testament of God. Indeed, it is an infinite beauty that never leaves their mirror.

God has servants who cloak themselves in a wisdom, knowingness and grace invisible to others. Out of their excessive jealousy and love for God these servants cloak themselves, just like Mutanabbi says of beautiful women:

*Figured silks they wore,
Not to beautify,
But to guard their beauty
From lustful eyes.*



COMMENTARY

Rumi sits on the floor with his students, deep in contemplation. After a long time passes, perhaps an hour, someone cannot help himself from speaking. The silence is unbearable. He says, “Our Master doesn’t utter a word.”

Rumi answers, showing that he has been listening intently. He has been present and aware the whole time.

His response turns into an illuminating lesson, far deeper than the simple remark made. And yet it is a direct answer to not only the exact words spoken, but to the multitude of meanings hidden behind it.

If only we can listen to and hear Rumi’s words with the depths that he understands even the most casual of comments from his students.

He starts off indirectly, explaining that his hour of silence did not mean he was not teaching. Indeed, he had been sharing something that words could only hint at. It was the student who could not hear this inner

teaching because of his dependence on words. He then beckons this student to find the meaning behind his speech. Rumi is saying, “Loosen your hold on this outer form and connect directly with the source of these words.”

...without an inner connection to that saint or prophet...

In other words, all of religion comes to nothing without that inner connection. Outer words and teachings mean nothing without that link.

Therefore, strip off the outer cloaks of appearances and see with inner eyes the true reality. It is this spiritual substance shining through the outer forms that gives them life. Listen to it and see it directly. Give up this dependency on the outer form.

All these outer things, after all, are merely a trial. They hide what is real. The beauty they contain is borrowed. Truth is something eternal. Close one window and the sun’s light is not extinguished. It comes through another window. It might look different, but it is the same sun.

The reality of things is what draws us on, whether we realize it or not. But do we look for this reality, or are we caught up in the thousand things? Do we look beneath the shrouds of our desires to see their true purpose?

If we do, we will see that through all the thousands and thousands of things we search for, there is really just one thing we truly want.

Therefore, it was not ten or a hundred things, but one thing that drew us.

The danger of wealth and power is that they distract us from Truth. When our eyes turn toward outer prosperity and riches, we grant them power over us. We then want to be liked by those who are famous. We

start wondering how to receive gifts from those with money. We become the servants of power.

It is a pity to reach the ocean and to be satisfied with a pitcher-full from the sea.

What ocean is Rumi talking about?

That Ocean is the science of the saints, and within that Water is the Pearl Itself.

He is still answering the student. He is still explaining how much more there is than mere words. How can you be satisfied with words when the inner teachings—the science of the saints—contains all that you ever desired?

This Pearl is hidden within you, but how can you expect to recognize it until you have learned this science?

It is only in the hands of the astronomer that the astrolabe becomes valuable. Others might read sacred books yet never see what those books really mean. They might look within themselves but never see God.

People are the astrolabe of God, but it requires an astronomer to use the astrolabe.

There are those who long for the True Desire so deeply that they search beneath every shroud and desire that crosses their heart. They learn to discriminate even the meaning of their own careless feelings and to understand the secrets hidden within them.

Indeed, it is an infinite beauty that never leaves their mirror.

But there is another reason why Rumi was silent and chooses to teach through silence:

God has servants who cloak themselves in a wisdom, knowingness and grace invisible to others. Out of their excessive jealousy and love for God these servants cloak themselves...

Rumi is explaining that there is a limit to how much a teacher can reveal outwardly before attracting too much attention and becoming an object of worship. The personality then becomes just another of the hundred things that hide true wisdom. It draws the wrong kind of desires—not true love for God. This is why there are some who shun public displays and work only through spiritual channels.

Silence is the cloak of the inner teachings.

... to guard their beauty from lustful eyes.

* * * * *

These are far from the only interpretations of this discourse. For example, you may notice that the student's question was not so much a careless comment as an expression of his hunger. Rumi explains where words lie in the scope of Reality. He then goes on to tell a story about hunger, when he describes how we ask for vermicelli, or ravioli or fritters. It is the hunger that matters.

You will probably become entranced by Rumi's whirling dance of words that spin within each other. He tells us that words mean nothing, and then through his explanation his words open doors to new visions of what words cannot describe. It becomes like a spinning vortex that pulls us deeper into Reality, shorn of all outer form. How does he do this? We must let go of our thinking to follow him. He isn't speaking so much as taking us somewhere. Can you see how this merges into the whirling dance of the dervishes that he started?

You might also notice that the story of the veiled women was not just about how Muslim women hide their beauty from lustful eyes. Hidden in this example is also how they unveil themselves within their homes. Thus, if you want to see true beauty, you must look within yourself where all veils are dropped.

Hopefully, from this you can see that there are hundreds of threads woven together in these discourses. Pick one and follow it. Any one will do. Where does it take you? It isn't the thought of it that matters, it is the experience. And yes, this too is exactly what he was telling us with this discourse.