



THE MASTERS OF BEING

RUMI

THE WOUND
THROUGH WHICH
LOVE ENTERS

*Rumi, the Dissolution of Separation,
and the Return to the Beloved*

AARON GARRITY

A MASTERS OF BEING READING EDITION

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THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED INTO LOVE

There are people who enter our lives and become part of the life we are already living.

Then there are those whose arrival makes that life impossible to continue.

They do not always disrupt us through betrayal or cruelty. Sometimes they disrupt us through recognition. They see beneath the identity we have constructed, beyond our accomplishments and defenses, into a place we have barely admitted exists. Their presence awakens something too large for the person we have been.

Jalal al-Din Rumi became such a person for generations who encountered his teachings. Before he became the poet whose words would cross religions, languages and centuries, someone else became that person for him.

His name was Shams of Tabriz.

The historical record does not allow us to reconstruct every detail of their meeting with certainty. Legend has gathered around it, as legend often gathers around encounters that seem too consequential to remain ordinary. What we know is that when Shams entered Rumi's life, Rumi was already accomplished. He was a respected Islamic scholar, jurist, preacher and spiritual teacher. He possessed learning, authority and a public following.

By the standards of his world, he had arrived.

Then he met a wandering mystic who seems to have regarded arrival as another form of sleep.

Something in Rumi opened. Something else could not survive.

The scholar became a poet. The teacher became a lover. The man who had spoken about God began writing as though the distance between the seeker and the Divine had caught fire.

Rumi's life confronts us with a difficult possibility: we may become successful within an identity that remains too small for us. We may master the language of truth without surrendering to its consequences. We may accumulate knowledge about the fire while remaining carefully outside its heat.

Then life sends someone, or something, that asks us to burn.

THE SONG OF SEPARATION

Rumi's *Masnawi* begins with the cry of a reed flute torn from the reed bed.

Its music is born from separation.

The reed does not merely sing beautifully. It laments the source from which it has been cut. Its hollow body becomes an instrument precisely because something has been removed from it. Breath enters the emptiness, and the wound becomes song.

This is one of Rumi's governing images. Human longing is the voice of a being who has forgotten, but not entirely forgotten, where it belongs.

We often interpret longing as evidence that something is missing from our lives. Rumi asks us to consider a deeper possibility: perhaps longing is also evidence that something within us remembers.

We would not ache for belonging if we possessed no intuition of home.

The reed flute gives us the architecture of Rumi's spiritual vision. Separation produces the cry, but the cry is already a form of relationship. The reed can mourn the garden because the garden remains present within its memory. Its emptiness is not meaningless. It is the chamber through which breath becomes music.

This does not mean that every absence is divinely designed or that every wound will become beautiful. It means that the experience of separation may contain more than deprivation. Under the right conditions, it can become a passage through which the deeper life begins to speak.

The wound alone does not make the music.

The breath does.

BEFORE THE FIRE

Rumi was born in 1207 into a Persian-speaking family in greater Khorasan, probably at Vakhsh within the wider cultural world of Balkh. It was a region shaped by Islamic learning, political instability and the movement of peoples across Central and Western Asia. His family eventually settled in Konya, in present-day Türkiye, where Rumi inherited and expanded his father's role as a religious teacher.

The man who met Shams was not spiritually empty. He had been formed by the Qur'an, the life of the Prophet Muhammad, Islamic law, theology and Sufi teaching. It would be inaccurate to portray him as a dry intellectual suddenly introduced to the spiritual life. His transformation was more subtle and therefore more instructive.

He moved from an understanding he could teach into an experience that demanded his entire being.

The intellect was not Rumi's enemy. His learning gave him a language capable of carrying what later erupted through him. His poetry remained saturated with Qur'anic imagery, prophetic stories and the devotional world of Islam. Modern readers sometimes detach his language of love from that foundation, turning a Muslim mystic into a vague poet of universal feeling. In doing so, they make him easier to quote and more difficult to understand.

For Rumi, the Beloved was not merely a metaphor for personal fulfillment. The Beloved was God: nearer than the self, yet beyond the self's possession.

Knowledge had brought Rumi to the threshold. Shams appears to have demanded that he cross it.

There comes a moment when every serious spiritual life reaches the edge of explanation. The question is no longer whether we can describe surrender, love or union. The question is whether we are willing to be changed by what those words require.

I began discovering my own voice through singing. Long before boardrooms, international stages and the building of companies, there was a boy raised by a single mother, learning that a voice could reach beyond the circumstances in which it was born. I did not possess the language to understand what was happening. I only knew that something within me became more real when it was given expression.

Decades later, after building companies, crossing continents, speaking to audiences, losing worlds I believed would endure and watching new ones emerge, I find myself returning to the same mystery:

What was the voice for?

Perhaps we do not find our voice once. Life gives it back to us at several levels: first as talent, then as ambition, then as influence. If we live long enough and truthfully enough, it may return as service.

The first voice helps us enter the world.

The final voice reveals what we came to give it.

THE STRANGER WHO RECOGNIZED HIM

Accounts of the first meeting between Rumi and Shams differ. One famous tradition describes Shams interrupting Rumi with a provocative spiritual question, overturning the comfortable hierarchy between revered scholar and wandering stranger. Whether the exchange occurred exactly as later storytellers preserved it is less important than the truth carried by the story.

Shams did not approach Rumi as the public knew him. He addressed the unfinished man beneath the accomplished one.

This may be one of the rarest forms of love.

Most people meet the identity we present. Some admire it. Others compete with it, depend upon it or reject it. Occasionally someone speaks directly to a depth within us that has received no public recognition. We feel exposed and understood at once.

To be seen that deeply is not always comforting. It may threaten the arrangement by which we have secured our place in the world. If we are known as strong, another person's tenderness may reveal our exhaustion. If we are celebrated for certainty, they may awaken the questions we have concealed.

Recognition becomes dangerous when it reaches the person beneath the role.

The relationship between Rumi and Shams became intense, private and transformative. Rumi withdrew for extended periods from his students and ordinary routines. Those around him became resentful. Shams was blamed for the change.

This part of the story should not be softened into mystical romance. Every awakening takes place among other human beings. Families, students, partners and communities experience its consequences. A person may feel summoned into a greater truth while those nearby experience only absence.

Spiritual intensity does not remove our responsibility to examine the disruption we create.

There is a temptation among seekers to declare every overwhelming attraction sacred and every objection unenlightened. But intensity proves very little by itself. Projection can resemble revelation. Dependency can disguise itself as devotion. Escape can borrow the vocabulary of freedom.

The important question is not only whether a relationship awakens us. We must ask what the awakening makes of us.

Does it deepen our honesty? Does it enlarge our capacity to love? Does it free us from possession, or merely give possession a spiritual vocabulary?

Any encounter that claims to open us toward the Divine must eventually be judged by the humanity it produces.

WHEN THE BELOVED DISAPPEARS

Shams disappeared from Rumi's life. The circumstances remain uncertain. He may have left Konya. He may have been killed, possibly by people close to Rumi who resented his influence. History does not give us an ending strong enough to quiet the mystery.

Rumi searched for him.

At first, grief still imagined that the beloved could be recovered exactly as he had been. This is the first language of loss. The mind travels backward, revisiting rooms that no longer exist in the same form. It repeats conversations, revises decisions and searches for the unseen turn where another future might have begun.

Grief is not only the pain of what has ended. It is the collapse of everything we believed would follow.

Rumi's transformation deepened when the search changed direction. He began to discover that what Shams awakened could no longer be confined to the physical presence of Shams. The beloved had entered him too deeply to remain merely external.

This did not make the loss unreal. Spiritual interpretation should never be used to deny human grief. The soul may sense continuity while the human heart still reaches for a particular face, voice and touch.

Rumi's poems of longing, many gathered in the *Divan of Shams of Tabriz*, carry this tension. Shams remains the absent companion, yet the name also becomes something greater: a mirror of divine radiance, an interior presence and a doorway through which Rumi's identity as a separate author begins to dissolve. Rumi sometimes speaks through Shams, signs through Shams and disappears into the name of the one he loved.

He became more than the man awaiting another man's return. His grief became poetry. His longing became teaching. Shams ceased to be only the object of his search and became part of the consciousness from which he searched.

Some people remain with us in this way. Their physical presence may end, or the relationship may become impossible, yet we cannot return to the person we were before they arrived.

Our responsibility is not to spend the rest of our lives bleeding in their honor. It is to become accountable for what their presence revealed.

A wound can become an opening, but only if we stop requiring it to remain a wound forever.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF LONGING

Longing is among the most beautiful words in spiritual literature and among the most deceptive experiences in human life.

We may long because we are lonely. We may desire someone because they activate an unhealed pattern within us. We may pursue what withholds itself because uncertainty resembles an early experience of love. We may transform a person into a symbol and then demand that the human being carry everything the symbol has come to mean.

Sometimes longing leads us toward truth. Sometimes it returns us to the same injury.

Rumi's contribution is not the claim that everything we desire is sacred. It is the invitation to follow desire beneath its first object. What do we believe this person, achievement or experience will finally give us? Recognition? Safety? Completion? Permission to become fully alive?

The object of longing may matter profoundly. Human beings are not interchangeable. Certain relationships alter us in ways others cannot. But beneath many desires lies an older hunger: the longing to come home to ourselves and participate consciously in a life larger than the isolated ego.

The mistake is not loving another person deeply. The mistake is asking that person to become the sole source of what only a deeper union can provide.

No human being can safely carry the weight of being another person's God.

This is where Rumi's language of the Beloved can be misunderstood. Read superficially, it makes emotional obsession sound holy. Read deeply, it releases human love from the demand to complete what remains spiritually unfinished within us.

The beloved may awaken the door.

The beloved is not the entire sky beyond it.

THE TAVERN OF BEWILDERMENT

Rumi repeatedly enters the symbolic world of wine, intoxication, taverns, music and dance. These images can appear strange when separated from their mystical context. The intoxication he praises is not ordinary drunkenness. It is the temporary overthrow of the controlling mind before a reality too immense to be managed by reason alone.

The sober ego arranges the world around itself. It calculates status, danger, advantage and recognition. Divine intoxication interrupts that arrangement. The mystic becomes drunk because the usual boundaries of identity no longer appear absolute.

Yet intoxication is not the end of the path.

Spiritual ecstasy can become another form of self-absorption. A person may become fascinated with extraordinary states while growing less capable of honesty, responsibility and care. The experience of unity can be real while the interpretation placed upon it remains immature.

Rumi's poetry gives bewilderment dignity, but not because confusion is inherently wise. Bewilderment matters when it breaks the arrogance that assumes reality must fit inside our concepts.

There are truths the intellect can clarify. There are truths it must learn to kneel before.

The danger begins when kneeling becomes an excuse to stop discerning. Mystery should humble reason, not abolish it. Rumi's intoxication grows from a life already shaped by study and discipline. The vessel had been prepared before the wine was poured.

LOVE WITHOUT POSSESSION

Much of modern culture has received Rumi as a poet of romance. His lines circulate detached from their Islamic foundation and are polished into affirmations about finding the right person or trusting the universe to satisfy personal desire.

His actual vision is far less obedient to the ego.

Love, for Rumi, overturns the self that wants to own what it loves. It exposes our attempt to secure relationship through control, certainty and possession.

Human commitments matter. Loyalty matters. Love without honesty can injure everyone it touches. Surrender does not release us from the consequences of our choices. But even the deepest commitment cannot make another soul our property.

This is one of the hardest truths to live because love makes us vulnerable to forces we cannot govern. Another person remains free, mortal and mysterious. They may change. We may change. Life may separate what intention tried to hold together.

Mature love does not become indifferent to this possibility. It becomes courageous enough to love without pretending that control can eliminate loss.

I have lived long enough to know that love does not arrive in perfectly ordered forms. It enters lives already filled with history, responsibility, family, wounds and promises. I have known love as loyalty and conflict, as spiritual recognition and consequence. I have also learned that sincerity alone does not prevent pain. We remain accountable for the conditions our choices create.

Rumi offers no sentimental exemption from that accountability. He asks whether love is freeing us from the isolated self or expanding the territory that self wishes to control.

The question is not whether our love feels sacred.

The question is whether we are becoming more sacred in the way we love.

WHAT MUST DIE

Sufi tradition speaks of *fanā*: the passing away of the self in God.

This does not require the destruction of personality, agency or moral discernment. It cannot justify submission to abuse or the surrender of healthy boundaries. What passes away is the illusion that the constructed identity is the whole of us.

The ego has a necessary function. It helps us navigate the world, fulfill responsibilities and act as distinct human beings. The problem begins when this provisional identity claims absolute sovereignty. Then every disagreement becomes an assault, every ending feels like annihilation and every failure becomes a verdict on our worth.

Rumi's dissolution is release from the tyranny of the smallest self.

The identity we defend cannot imagine the freedom beyond its control. It assumes surrender means disappearance. Yet Sufi thought does not end with *fan*■. It also speaks of *baq*■: abiding in God, returning to life with a self no longer organized around its own supremacy.

One does not vanish into transcendence and remain absent.

One returns differently.

This distinction matters. A spiritual path that only dissolves the person leaves no one to care for the child, keep the promise, repair the injury or serve the community. The purpose of surrender is not to become nobody. It is to stop mistaking the smallest version of ourselves for the whole.

I once knew myself through what I had built and through the scale at which I could build it. There is nothing inherently false about achievement. Creating something consequential can be an expression of courage, vision and service. But when a world collapses, it exposes the difference between what we created and what we are.

Titles disappear. Organizations change. Audiences move on, sometimes before we have finished speaking.

At this point in my life, I do not feel that my voice has vanished. I feel it being separated from the structures that once amplified it. Somewhere beyond helping others articulate their visions is the audience waiting for what only I can say.

Perhaps this is another form of *fan*■: the voice does not die, but everything it once depended upon for permission begins to fall away.

And perhaps *baq*■ is the return of that voice without the old need to prove that it deserves to be heard.

THE DANCE AROUND THE STILL POINT

Rumi is inseparable in the modern imagination from the image of whirling dervishes, although the formal Mevlevi order and its ceremony developed through his followers after his death.

The symbolism remains extraordinary.

The body turns. One hand opens upward and the other toward the earth. The dancer does not escape embodiment but enters it more completely. Motion becomes prayer.

At the center of the turning must be an axis.

Without a center, movement becomes dizziness. Without movement, stillness becomes withdrawal. The spiritual life asks us to discover what remains oriented while circumstances turn around us.

Life moves through triumph and humiliation, youth and age, union and separation. The ego clings to each condition as though permanence could be negotiated. The soul learns another rhythm. It participates fully while belonging to something deeper than the movement.

The task is not to make life stand still.

It is to find the still point from which we can move without being scattered.

THE COMPANIONS AFTER SHAMS

Rumi's story did not end with Shams.

After the disappearance, other companions became important in his spiritual life. Salah al-Din Zarkub, a goldsmith, occupied a place of deep affection and spiritual companionship. Later, Husam al-Din Chalabi became the companion whose encouragement helped bring forth the *Masnavi*. Tradition holds that Rumi dictated or recited much of the work to Husam as they walked, taught and lived alongside one another.

This matters because it corrects the romantic temptation to make Shams the only relationship through which Rumi could encounter the Divine.

Shams was irreplaceable, but the form of love continued to evolve.

A person can be singular without becoming the final boundary of our capacity to love. The heart need not dishonor one profound relationship by continuing to live after it changes or ends. Loyalty to what was awakened may require us to allow that awakening new forms.

Rumi did not replace Shams. He integrated what Shams had opened.

This is one of the clearest signs of transformation. The original encounter no longer has to repeat itself in order to remain real. Its truth becomes generative. It produces further friendship, creativity and service.

The *Divan* carries the fire of Shams.

The *Masnavi* carries that fire back into the world as teaching.

WHEN ECSTASY RETURNS TO EARTH

Rumi's grief did not remain private. It became poetry, community and guidance capable of reaching people he would never meet.

That is the test of spiritual experience: what becomes possible when we return?

Does revelation make us kinder without making us naïve? Does surrender produce greater responsibility? Can we translate what we have seen into honesty, work, forgiveness and restraint?

There is no great spiritual achievement in touching eternity if we become careless with the people living beside us in time.

The authentic mystic returns to the marketplace. The father returns to his children. The leader returns to those affected by his decisions. The lover returns with greater tenderness and greater truth.

This is *baqā*: not merely surviving the dissolution of the old self, but abiding differently within ordinary life.

Transcendence fulfills itself through embodiment.

Love must eventually become behavior.

THE DANGER OF MAKING SUFFERING SACRED

The title of this essay contains a danger.

To speak of the wound through which love enters may imply that suffering is inherently holy or that every injury was divinely arranged for our development. That would turn a profound possibility into spiritual cruelty.

Pain does not automatically transform us. It can awaken, embitter, deform or overwhelm. Some suffering yields meaning only after years of work. Some remains senseless. Some should have been prevented.

We must never tell the abused that love sent their abuser. We must not tell grieving parents that their loss was required for enlightenment. Another person's devastation cannot become evidence for our spiritual system.

Love may enter through the wound.

That does not mean love inflicted it.

The wound becomes an opening when consciousness meets it with courage, support and time. Even then, healing does not require gratitude for the injury. We can honor what emerged from suffering while still naming what happened as wrong.

This distinction protects Rumi from our desire to make beautiful poetry perform the work of moral thought. His language invites transformation, but transformation must never excuse the forces that made it necessary.

The highest spiritual teaching does not glorify the wound.

It helps the wounded discover that they are more than what happened to them.

THE ONE WE WERE SEEKING

Rumi's journey reaches toward the dissolution of a fundamental illusion: that the seeker and the sought are absolutely separate.

The human experience of separation is real. We feel estranged from God, from one another and even from ourselves. We search through religion, ambition, romance, service, pleasure and achievement. Each promises some form of reunion.

Yet the deepest mystical traditions suggest that what we seek is not entirely elsewhere. The hunger itself may reveal our participation in what we desire. We long for the Divine because something within us already recognizes the shape of home.

This does not mean the personal ego is God. Rumi does not place the self upon the throne of the Divine. He empties the throne the ego has already occupied.

The drop does not command the ocean.

It discovers what it has always been made of.

There is humility in this realization. If divine life moves through every being, no person becomes disposable. We cannot claim union with God while treating other lives as obstacles to our fulfillment.

The end of separation is not merely a spiritual sensation.

It is the beginning of ethical responsibility.

LOVE AFTER POSSESSION

What does love become after it relinquishes possession?

It becomes the willingness to encounter another person as they are, rather than as a solution to our incompleteness. It tells the truth before resentment tells it violently. It accepts responsibility for the consequences of choice.

Love also learns to release. Release is not indifference or abandonment. It is the refusal to imprison another soul inside the role we need them to play. Love may remain real even when its form must change.

The ego prefers the certainty of ownership to the mystery of relationship, yet ownership has never secured what matters most. A person may remain physically present while becoming inwardly unreachable. Another may be absent and still transform the moral texture of our life.

Rumi asks us to measure love differently.

Does it enlarge the field in which both souls can become more truthful? Does it bring us closer to life? Does it deepen mercy while preserving discernment?

Most important:

What does love require us to become?

That question moves us beyond the endless accounting of who gave more, who stayed, who left, who understood and who failed. Those questions may matter, but they no longer define the horizon.

We begin to ask whether love is creating something through us that pain alone could never have produced.

RETURN TO THE BELOVED

Rumi did not find his way beyond grief by ceasing to love Shams.

He found Shams again at a depth where physical absence could no longer contain the meaning of their encounter. What began as friendship became transformation. Loss became poetry. The love awakened through one human being opened into a reality no single relationship could possess.

Perhaps that is why Rumi's words have endured.

They do not promise that love will spare us from breaking. They reveal that what breaks may also be the identity that has become too small for the life gathering within it.

I understand more of that now than I could have as a young man. I have lived an extraordinary life. I have known poverty and scale, applause and silence, creation and collapse. I have stood before audiences across the world and sat

alone with questions no audience could answer. I have loved imperfectly, led imperfectly and continued searching for the part of my voice that has not yet completed its work.

The soul's journey is rarely a straight ascent. We awaken, forget and awaken again. We build structures to carry what we have discovered, then confuse the structures with the discovery. Life eventually removes what can no longer take us farther.

There, where the old identity has opened, love may enter.

Not as a promise that every loss will be restored in the form we prefer, but as the recognition that beneath our temporary names, roles and separations, life is not divided in the way fear imagines.

Love asks us to become more truthful than our longing.

It transforms private pain into something capable of serving another human being.

Perhaps the Beloved was never asking us to escape the world. Perhaps love enters through a person, a calling, a grief or a moment of unbearable beauty and breaks open the room in which we have confined ourselves.

Then it asks us to return.

To our children.

To our work.

To those we have wounded and those who have wounded us.

To the unfinished responsibility of being alive.

We return without possessing what awakened us.

We return carrying it.

Like the reed, we do not deny that we were cut from the garden. We allow a greater breath to enter the opening. What once emerged as anguish becomes music. What began as separation becomes the very instrument through which belonging is remembered.

The wound is no longer proof that love abandoned us.

It becomes the place where separation could no longer persuade us that we were alone.