How to Live in Order to Move Toward the Divine

Simple Practices for Daily Life

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Introduction: A Question in a Rumi Class

In one of our Rumi classes, a classmate asked: “Everything Rumi says about love is beautiful, but in real, everyday life, what should we actually do to walk the path toward the Divine?”

Absolute perfection is God Himself, so moving toward perfection means moving toward the Divine: drawing spiritually closer to Him and cultivating divine qualities within ourselves, through a transformation of understanding, of love, and of the way we live. Rumi’s short answer to this question is that we need not take refuge in a cave or cut ourselves off from work, family and people. We live the same life we always have, but in a different way.

Rumi redefines “the world”:

«چیست دنیا؟ از خدا غافل بُدن / نی قماش و نقره و فرزند و زن»

What is the world? To be heedless of God; / not goods and silver, not children and wife.

The “world” that the mystics complain of is not work and home, possessions, family and wealth; it is **heedlessness**. So to be freed from the world, one must step out of heedlessness, not out of life. And his parable holds this whole view within it:

«آب در کشتی هلاکِ کشتی است / آب اندر زیرِ کشتی پشتی است»

Water inside the boat is the boat’s ruin; / water beneath the boat is its support.

If life stays beneath the boat of the heart, it carries it forward; if it settles inside the heart and fills it, it sinks it.

If we see worship as smoothing the road toward the Beloved of all existence, then every moment of our ordinary daily life can be an act of worship, whenever our state and our action in that moment bring us closer to God. There is no part of our “wholesome” daily life that cannot be turned into worship through attention to God.

What follows are some practical ways, inspired by Rumi. They are not separate exercises; they are different facets of one way of life, and all flow from a single source: attention to the Beloved and love for Him. They are our efforts to move toward the Divine; yet at every step, He Himself helps, so that this infinite road becomes walkable.

Some of the sections in this text are simple practices for daily exercise; others are horizons toward which we can move on the path toward the Divine. In some of them, more explanation has been given in order to prevent common misunderstandings; so a longer section does not mean a more important one.

In several sections, reference is made to Rumi’s emphasis on the importance of having a spiritual master (pir) and on his help in showing the way and the wrong way. The criteria that the Masnavi sets out for recognizing and testing a spiritual master will be presented in another article.

Part One: Relationship with the Beloved

1. Do Every Daily Task with Attention to the Beloved

The most important principle is to carry out the ordinary tasks of life in remembrance of Him and with the intention of drawing closer to Him. We need not do anything extraordinary; the same everyday tasks, done with attention, become worship. And since the Beloved is absolute perfection and the source of all goodness, sincere attention to Him also brings us closer to truthfulness, fairness and ethics (Section 14).

In practice: while doing any ordinary task (working, eating, driving, caring for family, meeting someone), let us keep the Beloved of all existence in mind.

2. Live and Work with Love

Let us try to do things not out of compulsion, habit, fear or the expectation of reward, but out of love. Goodness without reproach, so that it may purify our heart. For Rumi, purity is not a precondition of love; it is love's companion and its fruit. We fall in love, we live lovingly, and love purifies us:

«هر که را جامه ز عشقی چاک شد / او ز حرص و عیب کلی پاک شد»

Whoever's garment is torn by a love / is wholly cleansed of greed and every fault.

Love is something we practice. True love in the heart will surely show itself in our actions and in the way we live. It is this true love that keeps our good deeds from becoming a project for "making me bigger." So let us take care that our "I" is less and less at the center of the story.

3. Truth in the Heart Rather Than Outward Form

For Rumi, the measure of worship is its inner state, not its outer form. In the story of Moses and the shepherd, the shepherd had a mistaken image of God, but his love was sincere, and the revelation came:

«ما زبان را ننگریم و قال را / ما روان را بنگریم و حال را»

We do not look at the tongue and the words; / We look at the soul and the inner state.

So in every state and at every moment we can make this connection. Worrying about the outward form of the connection can, in many cases, diminish the inner state. And if our relationship with Him rests only on duty, instead of on love and inner presence, a far greater problem arises: we content ourselves with performing outward rituals and fall short of the essence.

This does not mean, of course, that if we lack full presence we had better skip outward worship altogether. Rather, with attention, we can arrive at presence of heart even if we begin only

from the outward form of worship. Most of us have an attention that is occasional and half-hearted, and Rumi himself has answered this:

«دوست دارد یار این آشفتگی / کوشش بیهوده به از خفتگی»

The Friend loves this disarray; / striving in vain is better than sleeping.

4. Be with Him Joyfully and with Delight, and Let Go of Sorrow

Our mind naturally leans toward pleasure and flees hardship and pain. So let us train our mind so that the remembrance of the Beloved becomes bound up with joy: by continually recalling His love, His kindness and His beauty, until the mind delights in being with Him and wants to be with Him:

«تا من بدیدم روی تو ای ماه و شمعِ روشنم / هر جا نشینم خرمم، هر جا روم در گلشنم»

Since I beheld Your face, O my moon, my bright candle, / wherever I sit I am glad, wherever I go I am in a rose garden.

This joy is not of the kind of ordinary joys; it is the joy of love:

«نگویم یار را شادی که از شادی گذشتست او / مرا از فرطِ عشقِ او، ز شادی عار می‌آید»

I will not call the Beloved "joy," for He has passed beyond joy; / from the excess of His love, I am ashamed of mere joy.

And going with love is far swifter than going with fear:

«سیرِ عارف هر دمی تا تختِ شاه / سیرِ زاهد هر مهی یک‌روزه راه»

The gnostic's journey reaches the King's throne with every breath; / the ascetic's journey covers one day's road each month.

«زاهد با ترس می‌تازد به پا / عاشقان پرّان‌تر از برق و هوا»

The ascetic, in fear, hurries on foot; / the lovers fly swifter than lightning and wind.

Our inner state has two layers: an overall, lasting state, and passing states that come mostly from outward events. This section is about the lasting state. Sometimes we sanctify sorrow and give ourselves the right to remain sorrowful. But if we truly have a sense of His presence in our heart, and have accepted the God whom Rumi introduced to us, His love brings more joy at every step and drives sorrow from the heart. Then our overall state becomes joy. This is the horizon of the path: the more continuous our joyful attention to Him becomes, the less room sorrow finds:

«ای غم اگر مو شوی، پیشِ منت بار نیست / پرشکرست این مقام، هیچ تو را کار نیست»

O sorrow, even if you grow thin as a hair, you have no entry to me; / this station is full of sugar; there is no work here for you.

«غصه در آن دل بود کز هوسِ او تهی است / غم همه آن‌جا رود کان بتِ عیار نیست»

Grief dwells in the heart that is empty of longing for Him; / sorrow goes only where that artful Beloved is not.

But sorrow must not be confused with the seeker's yearning. This yearning is the sign that we have caught a scent of Him and have not yet reached His presence:

«هر که را درد است او برده ست بو»

Whoever has this yearning has caught the scent.

It is the same yearning that the reed of the Masnavi laments:

«سینه خواهم شرحه شرحه از فراق / تا بگویم شرحِ دردِ اشتیاق»

I want a breast torn shred by shred by separation, / so that I may tell the yearning of desire.

Yearning awakens us and sets us in motion; sorrow is a burden that weighs the heart down and keeps it in place. We do not suppress this yearning, for it carries us onward to His presence; but the sorrow in which we linger and to which we cling, we let go. Such sorrow is the companion of the ego and keeps us far from the Beloved; and in the presence of the Beloved, it has no place to stay.

This does not mean that the lover does not experience the ordinary hardships of worldly life. Life and human relationships bring great sorrows with them, such as the grief of losing a loved one. It is recorded in the lives of the great mystics, too, that they experienced such sorrows and were affected by them. So the point of this section must not lead to the absolutist idea that the wayfarer on the path toward the Divine never grieves. Great sorrow comes; but beneath it, the joy of having the Beloved does not disappear; and as our attention returns to Him, the heart gradually comes back to its lasting state of joy.

In daily life, too, we have many reasons to be joyful and other reasons to be sad. Which of these two we attend to determines our state. So, given the importance and joy of sensing the Beloved's presence, we can set aside the sorrows of lesser importance.

One of the simplest ways to cultivate this sense of presence is to begin and end each day in remembrance of the Beloved. Before sleep and right after waking, let us say a few times, with presence of heart: "God, I love You," "God, I am in love with You," "God, thank You." This is not new. The tradition of morning and evening remembrance (dhikr) has flowed for centuries in our culture and among the people of the path, and in our own time psychologists, too, have stressed the effect of what we hold in mind before sleep on our sleep and our state. Rumi sees sleep as the nightly release of the soul from the snare of the body:

«هر شبی از دامِ تن ارواح را / می‌رهانی، می‌کنی الواح را»

Every night You free the spirits from the snare of the body / and wipe their tablets clean.

So one may say that what we fall asleep with is the soul's provision for this nightly journey, and what we wake up with is the first color laid on the tablet of the day.

These words are not a dry, repetitive litany that we must force upon ourselves; they are a door we open to the presence of the Beloved. Each time we say "I love You" with a sincere heart, the sense of His presence becomes a little more alive in us, and, as we have seen, joy follows presence of its own accord. The effect of this remembrance returns to our own being. The sorrows of the world gradually fade, the seeker's yearning takes their place, and a heart that has spoken with the Beloved every night and every morning can little by little say:

«هر جا نشینم خرمم، هر جا روم در گلشنم»

Wherever I sit I am glad, wherever I go I am in a rose garden.

In practice: morning and night, let us say those few sentences with presence of heart, and during the day let us spend whatever time we can in remembering the Beloved's beauty and kindness: with a ghazal, a look at nature, or the memory of a grace we have received from Him.

5. Be Grateful

Gratitude is one of the best ways of living. When we recall the blessings we have received from Him, our attention moves from the blessing to the Giver of blessings and settles on the Beloved; and this very attention makes us joyful and content. The blessing itself can make us heedless; it is gratitude that wakes us:

«نعمت آرد غفلت و شکر انتباه / صیدِ نعمت کن به دامِ شکرِ شاه»

Blessing brings heedlessness, and gratitude brings awakening; / hunt the blessing with the snare of thanks to the King.

And gratitude is not only a response to blessing; it is itself a road toward the Friend:

«شکر جانِ نعمت و نعمت چو پوست / زانک شکر آرد تو را تا کوی دوست»

Gratitude is the soul of blessing, and blessing is like the skin, / for gratitude brings you to the Friend's street.

The soul of blessing is this very attention to the Beloved. True gratitude means that even on hard days we see the good things that are still with us and do not forget their Giver. And little by little we reach the point where our main thanks becomes this: "God, thank You that You are"; until we feel that His presence, and having Him, is the greatest blessing, and every hardship fades before it.

In practice: before sleep, let us recall a few blessings of that day and say for each one, "God, thank You"; and at the end: "God, thank You that You are."

6. Prayer

Prayer is one of the most essential and most common ways in which we connect with the Beloved: asking of Him. Let us ask Him for whatever we want, but with a prayer accompanied

by trust and confidence. Let us ask Him for whatever we want and be confident that if we do not receive what we asked for, there was wisdom in it. Sometimes our wish does not fit within the order of existence. Sometimes we ask for something that is not our right and goes against the right of another. Sometimes our prayer, deep down, holds ill will toward others. And sometimes a mistaken outlook makes us substitute prayer for effort; like a sick person who, instead of going to a doctor and seeking treatment, only raises his hands in prayer. Whereas right prayer is prayer accompanied by the utmost effort we can make. In any case, for various reasons our prayer may not bring the result we expect; for reasons we may not know, yet let us try to accept the outcome.

What we ask for may be worldly or spiritual. Both are very good, because they become an occasion for speaking with the Beloved. The danger is praying as if we were owed something: praying and expecting that we must certainly get what we want. Such a view, in many cases, ends in disappointment and despair, which is poison on the path. But a prayer accompanied by hope and trust in God does not lead us into the dangerous pit of despair.

From the standpoint of the movement toward the Divine, the greatest benefit we gain from prayer is that for a time we converse with God and share the secret of our heart and our need with Him. This very speaking with God from the depths of the heart is the greatest benefit we gain from prayer, and if our values are in the right place, the joy of speaking with Him will be more precious and more exalted than any worldly gain:

«گفت آن الله تو لبیک ماست / وان نیاز و درد و سوزت پیک ماست»

He said: That "O God" of yours is Our "Here I am," / and that need, yearning and burning of yours is Our messenger.

(Masnavi, Book III)

This, of course, is an ideal goal. It is natural that, with our worldly outlook, we begin with a mistaken understanding of prayer: the image of a God with human-like powers and moods who, simply because we prayed, should pull strings for us and grant our wishes. Just as an important part of walking the path toward the Divine is coming to know God and casting away our mistaken images of Him, we must do the same with prayer. Of course, a long road must be traveled before our understanding and values are set right in this way. But by keeping that ideal in view and through conscious practice, we can gradually move in that direction; with the practice of consciously reminding ourselves, in every prayer, of prayer's main benefit.

The prayer we have discussed so far was personal prayer: prayer in which the "I" of the one praying is present. But there are other prayers in which the "I" is fainter, and their dangers fewer: prayer for others and prayer for the community. The weaker the bond between that other person and me, or the smaller the role the "I" plays in that community, the more "I-less" the prayer becomes. And the more the "I" leaves the prayer, the greater its effect on us and the fewer its dangers.

And the main point: it is better to think of prayer more as affecting ourselves than as affecting God.

7. Praise

One of the purest forms of speaking with God is praising Him. In prayer and gratitude, our "I" is the receiver and is present; but in praise there is only He. Praise of His beauty, His kindness, His generosity, His grace, His bounty, and all His attributes and goodness; especially those attributes that awaken in us an attraction toward Him and a joyful state.

Part Two: Inner Purification

8. Keep Watch over Our Ego

The greatest obstacle on this path is the ego (nafs). The ego is not only the desire for wealth and pleasure; the desire for superiority, for being seen, for being in the right, and even the feeling of spiritual progress also arise from it:

«مادرِ بت‌ها بتِ نفسِ شماست»

The mother of all idols is the idol of your self.

And the heroism of the path toward the Divine, in Rumi's words, is breaking oneself:

«سهل شیری دان که صف‌ها بشکند / شیر آن است آن که خود را بشکند»

Count it easy to be a lion who breaks the ranks; / the true lion is the one who breaks himself.

Wanting a good and comfortable worldly life is not bad, unless it swells our egoism and takes us away from the Beloved. The ego knows each of our weaknesses and knows what inflates our pride and egoism, and it puffs up our egoism by that very route. So we need to know ourselves and the facets of our pride and egoism in order to be able to resist them.

Judging our ego with our own reason is a difficult task. As we advance on the path toward the Divine, our particular intellect, which at the start of the path was the ego's instrument, gradually grows and turns into a perfected intellect that is the instrument of our heart and soul and helps us on the path toward the Divine. But while we are at the start of the path and the particular intellect is still the instrument of the dominant ego, it mostly seeks to justify the ego and its egoism. This is where, by looking into the mirror of truth, we can become more aware of our ego:

«چون که مؤمن آینهٔ مؤمن بود / روی او ز آلودگی ایمن بود»

Since the believer is the mirror of the believer, / his face is kept safe from defilement.

When someone has purified his heart through faith, we see our own truth when we look into the mirror of his heart. This is one of the main services a spiritual master does for us. Caring friends can also help us and show us the flaws of our egoism. Even enemies who may not wish us well at all sometimes magnify and display the flaws of our ego in order to strike at us. In all these cases, instead of the ego's natural reaction, which is a reasonable defense of itself, we must try to see the truth in what they say and use it to correct ourselves.

9. Do Not Find Fault with Others

Our mind is always looking for an excuse to find fault with others. This is part of that same sense of superiority: we accuse others and bring them down so that we ourselves rise higher. Fault-finding is one of the mind's games that takes attention away from ourselves and places it on others; instead of correcting ourselves, we criticize others and issue instructions to them.

Rumi shows this game in the story of the four Hindus who stood in prayer in a mosque: one spoke in the middle of the prayer, another rebuked him that his prayer was void, the third rebuked the second, and the fourth thanked God that he was not like those three. All four broke their prayer; and three of them only by finding fault with another.

Rumi regards reviling the pure and finding fault with the flawed as a sign that our own veil is being torn, and he sees the other way as turning to weeping: bringing the bitter, salty awareness that the defilement of the ego has gathered within us up to the eyes like tears, so that we may see it and strive to correct it:

«چون خدا خواهد که پردهٔ کس درد / میلش اندر طعنهٔ پاکان برد»

When God wishes to tear someone's veil, / He turns his inclination toward reviling the pure.

«ور خدا خواهد که پوشد عیبِ کس / کم زند در عیبِ معیوبان نفس»

And if God wishes to cover someone's fault, / that person hardly breathes a word about the faults of the flawed.

«چون خدا خواهد که‌مان یاری کند / میلِ ما را جانبِ زاری کند»

When God wishes to help us, / He turns our inclination toward weeping.

Many of the faults we see in others are reflections of ourselves; just as the lion in the story of the beasts of prey took his own image in the well for an enemy:

«ای بسا ظلمی که بینی در کسان / خوی تو باشد در ایشان ای فلان»

Many a wrong you see in others, my friend, / is your own nature reflected in them.

And:

«پیشِ چشمت داشتی شیشهٔ کبود / زان سبب عالم کبودت می‌نمود»

You held blue glass before your eyes; / that is why the world looked blue to you.

«گر نه کوری این کبودی دان ز خویش / خویش را بد گو، مگو کس را تو بیش»

If you are not blind, know this blueness comes from yourself; / blame yourself, and blame no one else.

10. Watch Our Inner Feelings and Do Not Act on Negative Ones

Anger, envy, rancor, fear and other negative feelings distort our view and our judgment:

«خشم و شهوت مرد را احول کند / ز استقامت روح را مبدل کند»

Anger and lust make a man see double; / they turn the spirit away from uprightness.

At the beginning, controlling behavior is much easier than controlling feeling. So first, if a negative feeling arises, let us try not to act on it; feeling something and acting on it are not the same. With this practice, we gradually gain the ability to master the feeling itself. And the most effective way is to cultivate positive feelings and behavior, so that negative feelings find no opportunity to arise.

Rumi's model is the story of Ali. In the heat of battle, when his opponent spat at him, he laid down his sword so that his blow would not come from personal anger, and he said:

«شیرِ حقم، نیستم شیرِ هوا / فعلِ من بر دینِ من باشد گوا»

I am the lion of God, not the lion of passion; / my deed bears witness to my faith.

A large part of this watchfulness is watching the tongue; for what leaps from the tongue never returns:

«این زبان چون سنگ و هم آهن‌وش است / وانچه بجهد از زبان چون آتش است»

This tongue is like flint and steel, / and what leaps from the tongue is like fire.

And:

«صبر و خاموشی جذوبِ رحمت است»

Patience and silence draw down mercy.

So during the day let us pay attention to our inner feelings. Whenever a negative feeling such as anger, envy or rancor arises, before any reaction let us pause for a moment and think: What am I feeling, and why? Then let us decide consciously whether we should do anything, and if so, how; rather than acting at that feeling's command. Before sending a harsh message, let us postpone the conversation to another time; and before speaking about someone who is not present, let us ask ourselves: If they were here, would I say the same thing?

11. Cleanse the Heart of All Negative Feelings, Such as Rancor and Envy

The previous practice concerns the moment a feeling arises; this one concerns the gradual purification of the heart. The goal is for the heart to be gradually cleansed of all negative

feelings, such as rancor, envy, greed and enmity, and for love, kindness, gratitude and hope to take their place. Rumi sees the heart of the people of truth as a polished mirror:

«لیک صیقل کرده‌اند آن سینه‌ها / پاک از آز و حرص و بخل و کینه‌ها»

But they have polished those breasts, / clean of craving, greed, avarice and rancor.

This freedom from rancor holds even toward someone we consider an enemy. Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was asked: "Do you hold Satan as your enemy?" She said: "Out of love for the Merciful, I have no time for enmity toward Satan" (Attar, Tadhkirat al-Awliya). Freedom from rancor is not indifference: if a wild animal attacks us, we defend ourselves, but we do not hold rancor against it. In the face of human wrongdoing, too, one can stand firm and defend what is right without surrendering the heart to hatred. And let us even train ourselves so that our response to injustice is not anger, but a motive to act and to help the oppressed.

So let us continually examine our feelings, and if we find a negative feeling, replace it with a positive one. To reach this goal, we need to correct our point of view. For example, if someone wrongs us and we look from the point of view of the "I," we become angry. But if we change our point of view and look through their eyes, even if we consider their view mistaken and try to reduce the harm of that wrong, we may well find compassion in ourselves for their circumstances.

Part Three: Facing Life and Others

12. Every Occurrence, an Opportunity to Draw Near to the Beloved

What matters is not only what happens to us, but what we do with it. Ease and hardship can both become a grace from Him, if we turn both into an opportunity to move toward Him:

«عاشقم بر قهر و بر لطفش به جد / بوالعجب من عاشقِ این هر دو ضد»

In earnest I love both His wrath and His grace; / how strange that I love these two opposites!

In ease, let us remember Him with gratitude (Section 5). In hardship, let us turn to Him with hope; suffering, if it faces Him, awakens us:

«حسرت و زاری گهِ بیماری است / وقتِ بیماری همه بیداری است»

Regret and lament come in the time of illness; / the time of illness is all wakefulness.

And the lover finds a different taste even in affliction:

«در بلا هم می‌چشم لذاتِ او / ماتِ اویم ماتِ اویم ماتِ او»

Even in affliction I taste His delights; / I am checkmated by Him, checkmated, checkmated.

«رحمتی دان امتحانِ تلخ را / نقمتی دان مُلکِ مرو و بلخ را»

Know the bitter trial to be a mercy; / know the kingdom of Merv and Balkh to be a punishment.

«ای نخود می‌جوش اندر ابتلا / تا نه هستی و نه خود مانَد تو را»

O chickpea, keep boiling in affliction, / until neither existence nor self remains to you.

Depending on the kind of insight we have, both ease and hardship can either bring us closer to Him or take us farther away. The choice is ours: in ease with gratitude, in hardship with hope, and in both with remembrance of the Beloved.

When we face hardship, instead of sinking into despair, let us ask ourselves: How can this hardship bring me closer to Him?

13. Become His Mirror and Reflect His Love to All Existence

Mystics hold various views of existence, nature and humanity: some see the world as His creation, some as a manifestation of His beauty, and some see the infinite Truth in all things and everywhere. But the result of all three views is the same: love for all existence. If our God is Rumi's infinitely beautiful and kind God, our love for Him is reflected in existence too, and we will love human beings as well.

Then helping those in need is not for the sake of going to paradise and an otherworldly reward, but because we love them. Our smile toward others and our kindness with them come from seeing a trace of the Beloved in them. Even the worst human beings carry a subtle spark of the Divine in their hearts, but egoism and attachment to what is other than God have covered it. So our feeling toward them, too, is not anger and hatred, but compassion and sympathy (Section 11).

Every good deed that comes from our hands bears fruit:

«چون ز دستت رست ایثار و زکات / گشت این دست آن طرف نخل و نبات»

When self-giving and almsgiving grew from your hand, / that hand became, on the other side, palm trees and sweetness.

And the safest form of this love is service that no one sees, so that the ego cannot claim it as its own as well.

In every encounter, before we go looking for someone's faults, let us try to see a trace of the Beloved in them. And every week let us do a good deed for someone without anyone, not even that person, knowing who it came from; and let us ourselves soon forget it.

14. Live Ethically

If our God is Rumi's ethical God, the source of all goodness, then to draw near to Him we too must be ethical and act ethically. Love for Him must not remain only an inner feeling; it must become visible in our conduct. Truthfulness, fairness, keeping promises, respecting the rights of others and earning an honest living are the everyday arenas of the spiritual path.

But ethics in human societies also depends on time, place and culture, and sometimes the custom of a society is itself contrary to authentic ethics. If we live among thieves, theft may be an accepted practice, yet in truth it is contrary to authentic ethics. So the wayfarer's standard is not what everyone does, but the authentic ethics that springs from the Beloved. "Everyone does it" is no proof that something is right.

But there is a dangerous pit here as well. Sometimes we reject the ethics of our society's custom because it does not serve our interests; and the ego can pass off any desire of its own that runs against the custom of the community as authentic ethics. And sometimes we reject it because we believe it goes against God's will; but our main mistake lies in our understanding of His will. Here, too, we may put the "I" and "my belief" in place of the Truth, and a self-made ethics in place of authentic ethics.

Our inner conscience, if it has not been tainted by egoism and the ego, can help us. Having a spiritual master, on whom Rumi relies, can also keep us from going astray. Companions on the path toward the Divine can also become mirrors for us and show us our ethical beliefs. How to recognize authentic ethics is a subject we will take up in another piece.

Part Four: Steadfastness on the Path

15. Companionship with Fellow Travelers

Rumi's path is not a path of solitude; it is a path of companionship and fellowship. We become more like the people we spend our days with than we imagine:

«هر که خواهد همنشینی با خدا / گو نشیند در حضورِ اولیا»

Whoever wishes to sit with God, / tell him to sit in the presence of the saints.

Companionship with the people of the path does not mean the usual having a good time; it is fellowship with companions who remind us of the Beloved of all existence, turn our attention toward Him, and increase our eagerness to go on. Such companionship sometimes moves us forward with love and encouragement, and sometimes, like a mirror, wakes us by honestly showing us our faults, even if what they say is not pleasant to hear. So the companion of the path is someone who helps us on the way, not necessarily someone whose words we always enjoy. And by the same measure, let us avoid company that holds us back from the path.

This companionship has another face too: companionship with the sources of truth, such as the Masnavi and the Divan-e Shams. A few verses of the Masnavi every day keep these practices alive in the heart.

16. Silence the Mind to Hear the Voice of Truth

Our mind talks constantly within us and in many cases shouts. This clamor leaves no room for listening: listening to the true words of others, the true words of the sources of truth, the true words of the spiritual master, and the truth that God conveys directly to our heart. Rumi has spoken of this silence many times:

«چون برسی به کوی ما، خامشی است خوی ما / زان که ز گفت‌وگوی ما، گرد و غبار می‌رسد»

When you reach our street, silence is our way, / for from our talk only dust and haze arise.

(Divan-e Shams)

That is why meditation (morāqebeh), a daily sitting to quiet the mind, is an important part of this path; a practice with a long history in our own mystical tradition. Other spiritual traditions also have similar practices, of which meditation in its various forms is the best known. The way of sitting can be learned from these traditions; the essence of all of them is inner silence. And let us weigh what we hear in this silence with the same humility described in Section 17, and also by its fruits: an insight that comes from Him increases love and decreases claims; whatever enlarges the ego is not from Him.

17. Remain Seekers and Do Not Become Rigid About Our Own Understanding

No human understanding of truth is absolute truth itself, though some understandings are closer to it; for we lack the capacity to encompass the Truth. The parable of the elephant in the dark is an image of exactly this: there is a real elephant, but each person has touched only one part of it. The wayfarer walks with seriousness on the path he believes to be right, yet is always ready to correct today's understanding:

«بی‌نهایت حضرت است این بارگاه / صدر را بگذار، صدرِ توست راه»

Infinite is the presence of this court; / leave the seat of honor: your seat of honor is the road.

And we need not know the destination fully before setting out; our understanding of what we seek becomes clearer in the going itself. The root of rigidity is the ego: when we hold "my understanding" dearer than truth itself. The true seeker wants truth more than he wants to be in the right.

Of course, a paradox arises here that the wayfarer must resolve within himself. On the one hand, a firm faith in the path toward the Divine is needed in order to set foot on it and go forward. On the other hand, he knows that his understanding of the path and the destination is incomplete and must become more complete and more true along the way. So we must center our certainty on the existence of the Beloved of all existence and on our capacity to draw closer to Him and reach Him, and make our understanding more right and more complete at every step of the way.

18. Review Each Night and Strive Anew Each Day, with Fear and Hope

Daily life is the main arena of the spiritual path, but its busyness draws us into heedlessness. A brief retreat is a chance to return to ourselves and to the Beloved, not an escape from life:

«خلوت از اغیار باید، نی ز یار»

Seclusion should be from strangers, not from the Friend.

This road is not traveled all at once, and it has no end:

«اندرین ره می‌تراش و می‌خراش / تا دمِ آخر دمی فارغ مباش»

On this road keep scraping and keep scratching; / until your last breath, do not rest for a single breath.

The wayfarer advances on two wings, fear and hope. Fear of the ego and egoism; fear of having erred; a fear that keeps him awake and seeking. This fear is not the ascetic's fear we spoke of in Section 4; it is fear of the ego, not of the Beloved. And hope that the Beloved does not abandon the sincere seeker; that He Himself takes our hand and guides us. And after every slip:

«کوی نومیدی مرو، امیدهاست / سوی تاریکی مرو، خورشیدهاست»

Do not go to the street of despair: there are hopes; / do not go toward darkness: there are suns.

At the end of the day, let us spend a few minutes alone with ourselves and go over these questions:

- When today, and how much, was I joyful in remembrance of the Beloved?
- What am I grateful for today?
- Where today did I act out of love and kindness?
- How did I actively seek the Truth today?
- How much, and how, did I deepen my understanding of the Truth today?
- Where today did the ego, anger, rancor or selfishness overcome me?
- What can I do better tomorrow?

Then, without endless self-reproach and without claims of progress, let us ask the Beloved for help and fall asleep in His remembrance (Section 4).

Conclusion: This Very Life, Lived Differently

Let us return to our classmate's question. To move toward the Divine, we do not need another life; we must live this very life in a different way: do our tasks in remembrance of Him and out of love, bring the heart to presence in worship, be grateful and joyful with Him, speak with Him in prayer and praise, keep watch over our ego, our feelings and our tongue, not find fault with others and cleanse the heart of rancor, turn whatever happens into an opportunity to move toward Him, reflect His love in kindness to His creatures and in an ethical life, keep company

with the people of the path and with the Masnavi, quiet the mind each day to hear the voice of Truth, keep our understanding open, and at night, with fear and hope, return to Him.

If we were to say this whole path in one sentence:

Certainty in Him, humility in knowing Him, and a loving movement between the two.