

## “Listen to the flute” by Rumi

Mostafa Momen

Princeton University, NJ, USA



Listen to the reed (flute), how it is complaining! \*\*\*  
It is complaining about the separations:

I want a heart that is torn, torn from separations, \*\*\*  
so that I may explain the pain of this love.

Whoever has been parted from his source; \*\*\*  
seeks to return to the days of origination.

Everyone became my friend from his (own) reasons; \*\*\*  
yet none searched out the secrets I contain.

My secret is not far away from my lament, \*\*\*  
yet, eye and ear do not possess that light to understand it.

Body is not hidden from soul, nor soul from body, \*\*\*  
Yet, none has the license to perceive the soul.

It is the fire of love that inspires the reed, (not just the wind!)\* \*\*  
It is the ferment of love that completes the wine.

Who has ever seen a poison and an antidote like the reed? \*\*\*  
Who has ever seen a consort and a longing lover like the reed?

In our sorrow the days of our life become unseasonable, \*\*\*  
The days have become fellow travelers of burning grief.

If the days passed, say go it matters not, \*\*\*  
But You, You remain, for nothing is as pure as you are.

The raw do not understand the state of the ripe, \*\*\*  
Hence my words must be brief, so Farewell!

O Boy, break your bonds, and be free, \*\*\*  
How long will silver and gold enslave you?

If you pour the whole sea into a jug, \*\*\*  
will it hold more than one day's store?

The greedy eye, like the jug, is never filled, \*\*\*  
Until content, the oyster holds no pearl.

Only one who has been undressed by Love, \*\*\*  
is free of defect and greed.

Hail, our sweet-thoughted Love, \*\*\*  
healer of all our ills,

Our Plato and Galen, \*\*\*  
remedy for our pride and our vanity.

With love this earthly body could soar in the air; \*\*\*  
the mountain could arise and nimbly dance.

Love gave life to Mount Sinai, O lover. \*\*\*  
Sinai was drunk; Moses lost consciousness.

Pressed to the lips of one in harmony with myself, \*\*\*  
Like the reed I would tell all that could be told.

But without a common tongue, I am dumb, \*\*\*  
even if I have a hundred songs to sing.

The Beloved is all; the lover just a veil. \*\*\*  
The Beloved is living; the lover a corpse.

If Love withholds its strengthening care, \*\*\*  
the lover is left like a bird without wings.

How can I have awareness of before and behind, \*\*\*  
when the light of my Beloved is not before and behind?

Love wants these words to manifest. \*\*\*  
(But) how is it that the mirror reveals nothing?

Do you know why your mirror reveals nothing? \*\*\*  
Because the rust is not separated from its face!

Friends, listen to the tale of this reed, \*\*\*  
For it is the story of our life, indeed!



*The original Persian poem*

*Note that this is the first poem in the Mathnavi book by Rumi and the story mentioned above corresponds to the rest of this great book! Also for this piece of writing some translations by Gamard 2000, and Nasr 2000 were used.*