

VISIO



DIVINA

*The Wisdom of the Contemplative Gaze*

**CONVERSATIONS  
WITH A RELUCTANT EMBRYO**

*Jalaluddin Rumi*

This is an intriguing poem full of amazing metaphors, with an interesting plotline and a compelling story to tell. It is also told with a deep sense of humor as well. Rumi imagines talking with a reluctant embryo (or partially developed fetus) who is refusing to leave the comfortable, warm environment of the womb and step out into the harsh realities found in the world of space and time.

He is using these cunning metaphors to describe a well-known spiritual problem or process that is common to many human beings in their spiritual evolution. You could make the case that every single human being is either in the spiritual state he is describing and having an argument with the Divine, or has somehow passed beyond it to live in a new state of being.

Rumi not only describes the essential beginnings of spiritual evolution in the womb of divine Spirit, he also describes the steps that must be taken beyond it. Metaphorically speaking there is a whole spiritual universe with multiple dimensions to discover. Weaning oneself appears to be, at least partially, a conscious act of attention—a deliberate choice that human beings can make. According to Rumi, we assist in our own evolution, and this evolution takes place at the deepest level of our being—at the level of the heart.

In the modern world we have been educated in developmental psychology as a key feature of how humans grow from infancy and childhood into adulthood. We know about Piaget and the levels of

cognitive development. We are also perhaps aware of Kohlberg's stages in moral development. We live daily with these levels of psycho-social development in ourselves, our families, and the people around us. We can detect and track them through the processes of human maturation.

Rumi is describing spiritual evolution in a similar manner, and inviting us to participate in our own spiritual becoming. We are being called into a maturation of Spirit at the level of the human heart that exceeds normal psycho-social development. It is a wondrous and a challenging invitation. This form of evolution is perhaps the most demanding of all of our levels of human development, and in our world, perhaps the most neglected. We worry over physical development in our children. We require cognitive development and psycho-social development through education and socialization in our students and peers. We hope for moral development and give guidance to those beginning their moral evolution in through ethical teaching in human society.

Spiritual development is often left for last, if it is attended to at all. The truth is that many otherwise mature human beings do not evolve on that level. They remain spiritual infants all their lives. They languish in the womb of uncertainty, resistance and doubt. They argue to remain safely infantile. Their arguments are silly and inane, but are used constantly in efforts of resistance to the voice and promptings of Spirit.

Rumi is a wise teacher, guide, and Master of Wisdom. He is a midwife of spiritual evolution in his poetry and he practiced that in his earthly life. This poem has much to teach us in the modern world. We each have much to learn.

## Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *When you first read this poem, what was your reaction?*
2. *There is often some shock of recognition reading this poem, either about our past, our present or our future. How are you yourself mirrored in this poem?*
3. *Where might you be on the path of spiritual evolution? How does Rumi describe you? Would you add anything new to his list or describe yourself differently?*
4. *Have you ever met a “spiritually resistant embryo” in the guise of an adult human being? What is this like? Describe it? What arguments and excuses have they used?*
5. *Using the metaphors that Rumi uses, what would be the spiritual meaning of such terms as blood, milk, solid food, searcher of wisdom, and hunter of invisible game.*
6. *The latter term is very mysterious, and appears in the image. When you see it, and contemplate its meaning in a process of contemplative gazing (or Visio Divina), how are you being guided to understand it?*
7. *How does it apply to your life? What invisible game are we talking about?*
8. *Why must it be hunted? Why does it not use the metaphor of shopping for it, or being served it in a fine restaurant?*
9. *Where are your current resistances to spiritual growth and evolution? What are your arguments? What is the obvious answers to your arguments?*
10. *There are two important images with this poem provided for the practice of Visio Divina. Explore each of them carefully. Each ones tells a slightly different story and shades the interpretation of this poem in new and important ways. What do you see that teaches you and informs your heart and understanding?*

## A Place for Notes

**and for Journaling your Answers:**

# LECTIO DIVINA

*The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text*

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Little by little wean yourself  
This is the gist of all I have to say:  
From an embryo, whose nourishment comes through blood,  
move to an infant drinking milk,  
then to a child on solid food,  
and on to a searcher after wisdom,  
and finally a hunter of even more invisible game.

Think how it would be to have a conversation with an embryo.  
You might say, “The world outside is vast and beautiful,  
there are wheat fields and mountain passes,  
and orchards in bloom.  
At night there are millions of stars, and there is daytime and sunlight  
and the beauty of friends dancing at a wedding.

You ask the embryo why he or she stays cooped up  
in the dark for years with its eyes closed.  
Now listen to the answer:  
*Are you crazy?*  
*There is no “other world” but this one.*  
*I know what I have experienced.*  
*You must be hallucinating.*  
*Now get out of here.*

—Arranged and edited  
for public reading and illumination by  
Lynn C. Bauman  
from the mystical poetry  
of Jalaluddin Rumi

These poems are found in the  
*Kulliyat-e Shams-e Tabrizi* (Volumes I-VII)  
or the *Mathnawi* (Volumes I-VI)

*This reflection, text and its  
illumination have been provided  
by Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman  
as a means for  
contemplative prayer.*

*Contemplating*  
**THE ILLUMINATIONS**



