

VISIO



DIVINA

*The Wisdom of the Contemplative Gaze*

## PASSION AND FIRE

*Jalaluddin Rumi*

An ancient and compelling image for Divine Reality—who God actually is—is light and fire. It is universal and perennial, found in every sacred tradition. God can be compared to both light and fire, and in the ancient world these two elements were one. It would be virtually impossible to have light without fire.

Whenever and wherever there was light there was fire. The question always is, what are light and fire's characteristics and what are their intensity? Is the divine Light soft and faint—just a glow? Or is that Light intense and blazing like a fire? Of course, we must imagine that divine Light can be manifest in all forms, and in the end it is the divine Reality which chooses each manifestation.

In wisdom teaching, divine Light is also linked to divine Love as an energy with all of its variations of intensity. This poem links them by the word “passion.” Does God know passion the way a human does? Because divine Reality is One—a single essential whole, then nothing is ever outside of that totality. When we experience any one of the attributes of God, we are in contact with all the rest. So Light in all of its variations of intensity reflects and expresses our experience of the multiple forms and intensities of Love.

In these lines from the mystic Jalaluddin Rumi we hear about the living Source of Light and Love in their variations. In knowing only our own experience we might forget the Source and what that Reality must be like in Itself. In our immediate world, our own Sun is the source of natural light. We live with various

experiences of that light from full summer sunshine, to a hazy winter sun, and then to cool reflected sunlight off the surface of the Moon. These are all multiple personal experiences we have of our Sun. None of them, however, can compare to the Sun itself, and no one, without protection can bear its intensity. Could this be the truth about divine Light? Rumi thinks so, but then likens it to divine Passion or Love.

In this poetic couplet we hear of burning and intensity. We also hear of creation and destruction. Rumi contrasts the intensity of fire and light with coolness. We hear about the divine world and the human world, and are given a vision of the Source and its manifestations. These descriptions are all interwoven and complex, and they involve our own personal human experience as we walk this earth. We also hear the prophetic voice of the divine Reality speaking to us in the poem.

Poetry takes us out of our normal patterns of thought. All of our thinking is typically anthropocentric, but the poet often becomes theocentric (seeing and experiencing things from the divine point of view). It has to be true that the Source knows and experiences itself and the world in a completely different way from the our normal perceptions. Can we begin to see and think from the perspectives of the divine Reality? What would we come to know and understand if we did? Light and fire are always creating and destroying the world, and metaphysically speaking, nothing is ever outside that Light (living outside the divine “atmosphere”). The question is: how do we understand this? More importantly, how do we experience this, and can we trust our experience?

## Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *Notice the prophetic voice in this short poem. What are your personal responses to this prophetic poem and its accompanying image? How do they compel you? Do you fear them in any way?*
2. *If your response is one of fear, why do you think that is so?*
3. *If you are attracted to step into the intensity of this poem and its image, how do you need to prepare yourself?*
4. *What has been your experience of the divine Light?*
5. *Would you say that you have been guided by (or into) the divine Light as fire?*
6. *Would you call your own experience with God "passionate" in any way?*
7. *How might your experience of human passion for any thing, person, or idea give you a clue about the inner experience of God?*
8. *What in your own experience of passionate love? Is it like fire and light?*
9. *If light is about illumination and enlightenment, how would its increase affect you (your heart and your mind)? How have you experienced it before this? What about the divine Love or the passion of God?*
10. *Would passion ever destroy anything, any world? Can divine Love destroy as well as create? How might we experience that cycle?*
11. *In what way do you think divine Light and Fire might destroy this world? What kinds of destruction could the poet be talking about? We imagine the material world being destroyed, but are there other non-material forms of destruction?*

## A Place for Notes and for Journaling your Answers:

# LECTIO DIVINĀ

*The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text*

*A*  
All the world's passions  
are simple  
beside this passion,  
cool beside this Fire.

*“I am the fire that ignites the world,  
and shall destroy it.”*

*—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 ILLUMINATION**

