

VISIO



DIVINA

The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision

THE POWER OF THOUGHT

Jalaluddin Rumi

Jalaluddin Rumi's poem is wisdom's reflection on the peril and promise of the thinking mind, whose power is one of the great gifts bestowed on humankind. Human beings have a huge capacity to think and reflect, to plan and to create, and then to execute those thoughts in the real world. The results are all around us—a civilization that has now spread across the planet.

The truth is, however, we do not live only in our civilization. For the most part, we live inside our heads. Our thinking mind is the actual world we inhabit. In some respects it is a beautiful world; In other ways it is the most difficult environment we can possibly imagine. Because of its great power it has the capacity to recreate both our outer and inner worlds so that they become cages which entrap us. Rumi chooses to think about this problem in a contemplative way, from the perspective of perennial wisdom.

A practitioner of wisdom attempts to live outside the cage of thoughts by seeing them for what they are. They have a reality that can deeply affect us, but in the end, these thoughts emerge, or just appear from "nothing" and out of "nowhere." From nothing we make ourselves happy. From nowhere we become sad. Our thoughts create these worlds and we inhabit them. We tend to blame the circumstances around us for creating our thoughts, but are our circumstances the actual source of our thinking? It is a conundrum. We imagine that the outer world creates thought. Does it?

Rumi believes otherwise. He describes the thought world as burning with flames. Perhaps he is describing what for many people is a kind of living hell. Many

people describe their world in this manner, especially if they are in anguish and cannot escape these thoughts which seem to torture them. Rumi apparently knows this same human experience. He knew and had burned in those flames. Who has not known them, who has not had this experience at some time in life? .

Rumi compares such thoughts to an oven. He knows that even such burning has a purpose—to bake us until we are done—until we are full of wisdom. This he sees, perhaps, as the end-point of human experience. Rumi knows that we are living in time and in our thoughts (and even in the heat of them) in order that in the baking heat we might become fully ourselves.

One way to imagine this is that we are still raw until we have these experiences. We are not yet fully baked nor ready to feed the world. Rumi knows that we need to evolve into a form of reality that he calls being "fully yourself." This is a state of maturity that is the result of having experienced the world of thought and the flames of human thinking that we create for ourselves. Even these thoughts, as difficult as they are, have an effect which is to make us more mature—to bake the loaf of our souls until it is done.

Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) was an extraordinary poet, a wise teacher, spiritual guide, and a Master of Islamic spirituality and Contemplative Wisdom. He played the role of a spiritual midwife to many Muslims, Christians and Jews in his day. His spiritual mentor was Shams-e Tabrizi, who awakened him. This ancient poetry is meant to do the same, to awaken us in our own day.

Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *From where do your thoughts come? Think about this and try tracing your thoughts back to their source. What do you discover?*
2. *Can you remember a circumstances in which your thoughts suddenly changed and you are instantly living in a “new world,” due only to the change in your thoughts?*
3. *Describe the thought world you normally inhabit. How have you created that world?*
4. *When have your thoughts become like flames or like an oven?*
5. *Can you see that they have the effect that Rumi describes—to bake the soul until it is done?*
6. *If you continue to reflect on this metaphor, what other questions arise for you? Do you see any other issues about becoming mature and fully ourselves that need to be considered? What are they?*
7. *What would it be like to be “fully yourself?” Can you describe yourself as “baked” in this way?*
8. *Rumi equates becoming fully yourself with becoming fully wise. What is their relationship? When you are in a moment when you feel yourself to be wise, can you “taste” the “well-baked” loaf of yourself? What is that flavor?*
9. *As you ponder the images, what do they show or teach you? What do you see in them that is important to you?*

A Place for Notes and for Journaling your Answers:

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

LECTIO DIVINA

The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text

O
seeker

thoughts have such power over you.

From nothing you become sad.

From nothing you become happy.

You are burning in these flames

and I will not let you out

until you are fully baked,

fully wise,

and fully yourself.

*—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 1-VII)
or the **Mathnawi** (Volumes 1-VI)*

Contemplating
THE ILLUMINATIONS



