

VÍSIÓ



DÍVINA

UNION IS PURE WINE

Jalaluddin Rumi

Unity, union, oneness (*tawhid, echod, henosis, advaita*) are words used to describe the ultimate and primordial State of Being from which we come and to which we return. We find ourselves currently, however, inhabiting a world that is often the polar opposite of unity. As we experience separation and fragmentation, oneness is difficult to find. Union is of course possible in love, but such experiences appear to be temporary states, brief respites in a sea of disunity and disintegration.

Rumi knows, though, that unity and union with the divine Reality are like an intoxicating substance that he calls pure wine, which is the wine we seek, the wine that produces ecstasy in human consciousness. Union with God is intoxicating: it lifts us out of ourselves and delivers us into states of being and consciousness that we are meant to experience as pure enjoyment.

The poem expresses this as the drink that humanity deeply longs for, usually without knowing it. Rumi believes that we were created to drink this vintage wine in order to live in union with what is best for us.

This is the wine of heaven—heaven’s drink flowing from the garden of celestial paradise. Without this in our cup, what we drink is something less than the best.

Interestingly, Rumi likens our whole life to a single cup or chalice. We can, of course, fill that cup with a hundred other liquids, all of which may be delicious in their own ways. Or, instead, our cup may be empty and dry of everything, which only makes our longings deeper and more intense.

But when divine wine fills the cup and we sip from it—when union with the divine and unity with our fellow creatures is our experience sip by sip—the cup of life is filled with meaning, even bliss, and we are deeply satisfied.

Without this, Rumi asks, what is the meaning of the cup called life? Meaninglessness (dryness) is a state we often know. The cup could be filled with kool-aid, or something sparkling and fizzy, and we could drink that instead and perhaps enjoy the experience.

But when we taste the finest of wines in the cup (or wine glass) for which it was made, everything is “over the top” and pouring us into states beyond the cup itself. The cup of life cannot no longer fully contain us, the

wine overflows the cup, and we transcend the normal boundaries of life.

The Sufi mystics used these metaphors to lift us out of our ordinary way of perceiving God. Their metaphors shattered the glass of ordinary religious perceptions. Sufi teaching dared to use these heretical metaphors to push us into the tasting room of Spirit. They knew that with just one drink of this experience, we might never leave the divine tavern again.

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. He was awakened by his spiritual mentor, Shams-e Tabrizi, and his poetry is meant to do the same for us now.

Questions for Reflection

1. *Sufi mystics love the image of wine as a metaphor for the highest of human experiences—the taste of the divine itself. Christianity has this symbol at its heart as well. Judaism celebrates the use of wine at its feasts. These are all meant as metaphors pointing us beyond the literal toward the interior experience of divine union. Have you ever had a taste of union? How would you describe the taste? How would you describe the experience?*
2. *Occasionally we have an experience of a oneness or unity that it is so powerful we come away from it wondering why it ends. It is*

intoxicating to know it in a harrowing adventure, perhaps, where people come together as one to solve a problem or overcome a challenge. When have you experienced this? Why is it so powerful to us that we may remember it forever?

3. *Why is wine one of the enduring metaphors for this type of encounter?*
4. *Do you enjoy wine? What kind is your favorite? When you drink just the right amount (neither too little or too much) what is the state of euphoria like?*
5. *What is the process of wine-making? Does it have anything to do with the metaphor of union and unity itself?*
6. *You might want to look up the words for union, unity and oneness found in various sacred traditions and see what you can learn. Explore **tawhid** (Arabic), **echod** (Hebrew), **henosis** (Greek), and **advita** (Sanskrit). Journal what you find.*
7. *In what circumstances do you most often experience the union or unity which those traditions describe? Is it with God? Is it with creation or your fellow humans? How does it change you?*
8. *When you look at the illumination, what does it teach you? With which part of the image do you most identify?*

Lectio Divina

The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text

*Union
is pure wine.
My life
is the cup.
Without
your
wine
what use
is this
cup?*

— Jalaluddin Rumi
From the poetry of
The Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi
and
The Mathnawi

The Illumination

The Wisdom of Contemplative Seeing

