

The Phrasing Must Change

by Jelaluddin Rumi

Learn about your inner self from those who know about such things,
but don't repeat verbatim what they say.

Zuleika let *everything* be the name of Joseph, from celery seed
to aloes seed. She loved him so much, she concealed his name
in many different phrases, the inner meanings
known only to her. When she said, *The wax is softening,*
near the fire, she meant, My love is wanting me.

Or if she said, *Look, the moon is up,* or *The willow has new leaves,*
or *The branches are trembling,* or *The coriander seeds*
have caught fire, or *The roses are opening,*
or *The king is in a good mood today,* or *Isn't that lucky,*
or *The furniture needs dusting,* or
The water carrier is here, or *It's almost daylight,*
or *The clouds seem to be moving against the wind,*
or *My head hurts,* or *My headache's better,*
anything she praises, it's Joseph's touch she means,
any complaint, it's his being away.

When she's hungry, it's for him. Thirsty, his name is a sherbet.
Cold, he's a fur. This is what the Friend can do
when one is in such love. Sensual people use the holy names
often, but they don't work for them.

The miracle Jesus did by being the name of God,
Zuleika felt in the name of *Joseph*.

When one is united to the core of another, to speak of that
is to breathe the name *Hu*, empty of self, and filled
with love. As the saying goes, *The pot drips what is in it.*
The Saffron spice of connecting, laughter.
The onion-smell of separation, crying.
Others have many things and people they love.
This is not the way of Friend and friend.

Rendered by Coleman Barks after R.A. Nicholson translation
from

Open Secret: Versions of Rumi, trans. John Moyne and Coleman Barks
(Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1984), 82. © Coleman Barks. Used with
permission.