



Special Rumi Issue

# **Reclaiming Radicalism in a Mis-Radicalized World:**

## **How Rumi's Path of Love Can Transform Humanity**

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Sarah Snyder  
Rumi Scholar



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The Center for Faith, Identity, and Globalization  
1050 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036  
T (202) 429-1690  
E [cfig@rumiforum.org](mailto:cfig@rumiforum.org)

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## **Reclaiming Radicalism in a Mis-Radicalized World:**

### How Rumi's Path of Love Can Transform Humanity

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Sarah Snyder

#### **Abstract**

This country's present state of social and political fragmentation is driven by an alarming cultural shift toward extreme separation, individualism, and the harmful practice of "othering." This modern psychological condition ignores fundamental human interdependence, fueling internal conflict and a return to tribalism. To break this destructive cycle, we can turn to the spiritual teachings of Rumi, whose philosophy offers a timeless, universal framework for personal and societal transformation. He contends that Love is humanity's natural state. However, its expression is blocked by internal obstacles, primarily *Ego*, which fosters a false sense of separation, fear, and attachment to worldly concerns. The path to reunion with the Divine—or a "Higher Self" in secular terms—is the "Inner Jihad," a demanding spiritual struggle that involves self-discovery, embracing vulnerability, and surrendering to direct experience rather than rational intellect. We must reclaim the concept of radicalism as Radical Love—a spirit-centered commitment to interdependence and compassion—as the essential gateway to transcending self-interest, ending cyclical chaos, and achieving evolutionary sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Rumi, Sufi Path, Radical Love, Divine Oneness, Inner Transformation*

## Our Radicalized World



**We live in times of significant social, political, and personal upheaval. Global conflicts have evolved drastically over the past century, shifting from the large-scale conventional warfare of the two World Wars and the Cold War (with proxy wars such as Korea and Vietnam) to other regional conflicts.**

More recently, we have seen asymmetric warfare and mass terrorism, exemplified by countless random attacks across the country on various cultural, religious, and racial groups as well as on immigrants and politicians. American civil society as we once knew it is eroding, and the country has become increasingly divided, shifting from a once united population to a continent of tribes, a disturbing sign of political and social instability.

We have adopted a new—disturbing—normal, the concept of extreme separation for which we are willing to make war on Other, anyone who is unlike us in any number of traits and beliefs: race, nationality, culture, gender identity and sexual preference, socio-economic status, religion, education, or political alliance. What makes this new type of personal warfare so threatening is that it arises from within, from a belief that otherness exists, that we are separate from one another.

Separation is a perceived state of feeling disconnected from aspects of existence, particularly people, but also nature, and a sense of an underlying universal unity. We see ourselves as absolute entities unto ourselves without simultaneously understanding, let alone acknowledging, that we are collectively from the same Source, whatever you choose to call it—*God, Spirit, Divine Being, Oneness*.

In America, we tend to overvalue individualism and the idea that anyone can achieve anything with enough grit and determination, further feeding the sense of separation and making *othering* an easy choice. This belief ignores systemic societal issues faced by the nonprivileged, implying that “they” deserve their circumstances, no matter how dreadful. For example, “they” did not work hard enough or want it badly enough, which is why they are suffering.

**“In America, we tend to overvalue *individualism* and the idea that anyone can *achieve anything* with enough *grit* and *determination*, further feeding the sense of *separation* and making *othering* an easy choice.”**

Humans evolved and survived by living in groups; we are necessarily social creatures. Codependence is the antithesis of individualism and is often used pejoratively because we believe people should earn rewards through their own hard work. Conversely, self-reliance is highly valued yet, in some cases, is mistaken for healthy determinism, ignoring the fact that we rely on one another for our survival. We are codependent by design. We require connection with other people to be emotionally healthy, as well as for our basic needs of food and shelter. Individualism is not inherently bad, but we must practice it within the context of healthy interdependence, recognizing that our actions affect others and carry real consequences, for better or worse.

Othering has led to an unsettling rise in threats from non-state actors—ourselves, our neighbors, family members, fellow worshippers, colleagues, and even elected politicians. So we now wage a new war, or more accurately, revive an old war: tribalism. More frightening, today’s tribalism is unprecedented because of advanced technologies in warfare and the ease of spreading violence, the speed at which information travels globally, and a sense of entitlement. Exacerbating the false notion that only some can succeed while others must necessarily fail is our differing ideas of what it means to succeed or fail.

Rumi's era (1207–1273) was also marked by significant political and social upheaval—war on *Other*—particularly due to the Mongol invasions. Rumi's family fled their home to escape these invasions, eventually settling in what is now Konya, Turkey. At the time, the Islamic world was becoming fragmented. The Abbasid Caliphate declined, leading to the rise of new sovereign powers, such as the Seljuks, which superseded its political authority.<sup>1 2</sup>

**“...today's *tribalism* is unprecedented because of *advanced technologies* in warfare and the *ease of spreading violence*, the speed at which information travels globally, and a sense of *entitlement*.”**

Despite this political fragmentation, scholarship and literature flourished in the capitals of these Persianate dynasties, and commerce between East and West thrived. Sufism also became a vehicle for the spread of Islam, creating networks of practitioners beyond political boundaries. Rumi's teachings on love and unity remain highly relevant to today's world, as both his time and ours are marked by similar challenges: political instability, societal division, and a struggle for peace.

The modern embrace of extreme separation and individualism has become a dangerous psychological condition that ignores fundamental human interdependence, fuels internal conflict and tribalism, and works against our own best interests for safe and healthy communities. However, because we have historically lived with “cyclical chaos,” does that mean we are doomed to repeat the past in a cycle of conflict, punctuated by transient stability, where discord is the recurring global norm? One thing is clear: The choices we have made for millennia are unsustainable for our continued evolution and our very existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Court of the Caliphs: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> C.E. Bosworth, “The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian World (A.D. 1000–1217),” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, The Saljuq and Mongol Periods, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).



**“The modern embrace of *extreme separation* and *individualism* has become a dangerous psychological condition that ignores fundamental *human interdependence*, fuels *internal conflict* and *tribalism*...”**

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## The Human Experience

Love and longing are fundamental forces of human nature, core forces deeply rooted in our evolutionary survival mechanisms, brain chemistry, and psychological need for meaning and connection. They transcend simple emotions to act as primary motivational drives that shape our behavior, social structures, and personal development. In addition, love is an evolutionary imperative. From a biological and evolutionary perspective, it is the engine of the need for belonging and survival, the basis for social cohesion. Many psychologists consider it a primary, essential drive in human life.<sup>3</sup>

In spiritual terms, longing is a profound yearning for a deeper connection with the Divine. In secular terms, longing can be a yearning for fulfillment through connection, belonging, and purpose. We tend to experience longing as an inner restlessness and dissatisfaction with worldly pursuits, spurring us to seek meaning, find our purpose, or even transcend our own limitations. Our purpose does not have to be grand, but it must fulfill our need to feel that our existence matters in some way. Problems arise when our intentions promote discord, because even malefactors can have a deep sense of purpose and derive meaning in their divisive behavior.

**“...love is an evolutionary imperative. ...it is the engine of the need for *belonging* and *survival*, the basis for *social cohesion*.”**

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004).

Longing propels us toward love, and it needs to know separation to motivate us to find ways to close the gap between the object of our desire and love itself. Longing is also a critical catalyst for growth and transformation. The existential psychologist Rollo May described the desire for love as a search for “ontological rootedness,” a profound sense of belonging, validation, and feeling at home in the world.<sup>4</sup> So how do we feel at home in this chaotic world? How do we engender meaningful belonging?

The Pew Research Center and Gallup have tracked trends in Americans’ affiliation with traditional religious communities. In general, statistics show a decline in formal religious membership and an increase in secularization, making it one of the most significant social and cultural shifts in America in the past few decades. What makes this secularization significant is that it affects how and where we find our community (our tribe), how we form our moral underpinning (whom or what we put faith in), and how we manage our mental well-being (cope with personal challenges). It is not simply about a change in America’s religious landscape but rather a drastic restructuring of how our society is held together, including trust in one another, shared activities, and institutional support.<sup>5</sup> For many, political affiliation has replaced religious affiliation. America is seeing a move more toward radical individualism, from a society of “we” to a society of “me.”<sup>6</sup> Ironically, many people have found belonging in what are classified by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as “hate groups.” Because numbers are hard to measure, the SPLC does not track how many Americans are believed to associate with or sympathize with hate groups; however, the latest figures show an enduring presence of these groups in America, a documented 1,371 from a 2024 report.<sup>7</sup> Social groups that form around the concept of hate rather than love radically shift how we behave, what motivates us, and our sense of belonging.

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<sup>4</sup> Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Gregory A. Smith et al., “Religious Identity,” in *Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off*, Pew Research Center, February 26, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *The Year in Hate and Extremism 2024* (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2025).



## Breaking the Barriers to Love

Rumi believed that Love is humanity's natural state, already present within us. Through the transformative power of Love, we can shatter our complacency and begin a deeper journey toward self-discovery and reunion with the Divine. However, we tend to erect what Rumi calls veils, internal obstacles of our own creation, which prevent us from experiencing Love's intrinsic reality. Rumi calls us to recognize these veils so that we can dismantle them, thus sending us down the path toward direct experience of the Divine.

**“Social groups that form around the concept of *hate* rather than *love* radically shift how we *behave*, what *motivates* us, and our sense of *belonging*.”**

Rumi calls *Ego* the most significant veil separating us from the Divine. Although we all need a healthy *Ego* to navigate life and foster personal growth, an inflated *Ego* creates a false sense of self and attachment to worldly desires, which blinds us to our true nature. Texts from many spiritual practices, including Judeo-Christian-Islamic scripture, talk about rebirth and renewal, “dying to oneself,” specifically, tamping down *Ego* and surrendering to a higher purpose. With this surrender comes a knowing that, at its most base, *Ego*'s function is about self-preservation and control, instilling pride and forming the foundation for our belief that separateness is a legitimate state of Being. It is *Ego* that tells us that the Other exists.

We protect *Ego* primarily by rejecting vulnerability and emotional pain, thereby erecting the brickwork around the heart that prevents Love from flowing freely. *Ego* distances us from the ultimate reality of our true nature—Love. Rumi suggests that confronting and embracing our fears and wounds is the very path to opening ourselves to Love. We make this necessary confrontation and embracing more difficult when we build our social structures around a common fear of the Other.

Clinging to judgment, grievance, and resentment erects secondary barriers, those of the mind. These states demand that situations and people be or behave differently, creating rigid belief systems that imprison us. These thoughts and emotions further reinforce the concept of separation, pitting *Ego* against the experience of unconditional Love and distancing us from that which we ultimately seek—Divine Love or a Higher Power. Obsession with and attachment to material things, status, and people, along with a craving for external validation, create a false sense of fulfillment. For Rumi, this conflicts with our prime directive of seeking Love because these obsessions are rooted in earthly matters—idols, merely shadows of the eternal Love we innately seek. Rumi asks us to consider why we would want to stay in prison when the doors are wide open. He encourages us to free ourselves of those things we voluntarily cling to. To be free, however, we must stop allowing our jailer to be *Ego*, our collection of thoughts, worries, prejudices, and fears that make up the small mind and limit our real identity.

**“Rumi asks us to consider why we would want to *stay in prison* when the *doors are wide open*. He encourages us to *free ourselves* of those things we *voluntarily cling to*.”**

To break free of these barriers to Love requires self-discovery, which Rumi calls our “Inner Jihad,” or Jihad al-Akbar, the Greater Struggle. This inner struggle is not only the most challenging journey we could ever undertake but the most crucial if we desire true union with the Divine. The primary task, therefore, is to subdue *Ego*’s power through Love and awareness, ultimately surrendering to Divine Love through purification of the soul—recognizing the divinity of all life. Ultimately, we become conduits of Divine Love rather than barriers to it. Although fear of pain is given as one of the secondary barriers to Love, Rumi sees pain as a necessary part of our spiritual journey. This ancient ache of being separated from the Divine is what drives the longing for our reunion with it. Acknowledging the pain and walking through it can motivate us on the path toward self-discovery and reunion.

*“God’s treasure is found in ruined places.”*

Being wounded and experiencing sorrow are necessary for purifying the soul and finding peace. Hardships, the “dark night of the soul,” propel us to seek the Light. Allowing ourselves to sit with hardship and acknowledge it can help us begin to climb out of the chasm of despair. For Rumi, the loss of his beloved companion Shams of Tabriz was the catalyst that opened him up to his full poetic and spiritual potential.<sup>8</sup>

***“Hardships, ..., propel us to seek the Light. Allowing ourselves to sit with hardship and acknowledge it can help us begin to climb out of the chasm of despair.”***

Rumi emphasizes experience over intellect, defining it as changing the Self, not the world. Surrendering to direct and uncontrolled experience is the ultimate path to Truth and Love. For him, there are two types of intellect. Acquired intellect is gained from study, books, teachers, and what we are told. It serves the *Ego* and helps us survive in the physical world. Wisdom, on the other hand, is given to us by the Divine and already within us, a potential waiting to be tapped. We realize wisdom through the heart, not the mind. Cultivating wisdom requires first acknowledging that there is more than worldly knowledge and, second, a desire to seek what books cannot teach, coupled with our own persistence.

Our minds want logical and consistent explanations, and in this way, Rumi says we attempt to make the mystical mundane. Instead, he encourages us to invite wonder and awe into our lives, moving beyond explanation for explanation’s sake. Can we not simply allow that we may not have an answer or even need one?

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<sup>8</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *I Am Wind, You Are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992).

*“Exchange your cleverness for bewilderment.”*

Allowing bewilderment dissolves the boundaries of self and the physical world, that liminal intersection of spirit and matter. In this sacred space, Other does not exist; separation manifests as awe in the multi-faceted face of Creation. In addition, Rumi consistently encourages us toward direct experience of the deep, mystical sense. He believes that the experience of Love is superior to the knowledge that the limited, rational mind conjures. Although the intellect is a necessary tool for navigating the physical world, it is inadequate for knowing ultimate reality. Rumi identifies a place of pure experience, of unity, where the mind's labels and judgments have no meaning. True spiritual insight, he says, is found in transcending these intellectual constraints, where not only is language inadequate for describing that experience, but it becomes unnecessary.

*“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase “each other” doesn't make any sense.”*

## **The Sufi Path of Love**

In his book *The Sufi Path of Love*, William Chittick introduces the spiritual teachings of Rumi, organizing Rumi's works into the three stages of the path to Unity: theory, practice, and attainment of Divine Love. He says that Rumi had no intention of expounding on scientific, scholarly, or Islamic teachings in his works, but simply wanted to make listeners “realize that as human beings, they are bound by their very nature to turn toward God and to devote themselves totally to Him.”

Chittick goes on to say that Rumi “takes the principle of the profession of God’s Unity...as given and explains all that this principle implies for us as human beings” in terms of our ideas, activities, and existence.<sup>9</sup> He warns of the problem readers of Rumi’s work face if they try to separate what he says from how he says it, claiming Rumi’s message could become “dry and uninspiring.” Because many Westerners may be unfamiliar with Rumi’s references to the Qur’an, Muslim saints, and the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), this unfamiliarity may present obstacles to understanding.

Despite this, Chittick says, the universality of his message affords readers access through the “richness of symbolism.” Rumi has indeed attracted much attention not only in his own day but in the present, more than seven hundred years after his death, in part because of his liberal use of imagery drawn from sources familiar to all human experience.

**“Rumi has indeed attracted much attention not only in his own day but in the present, ..., in part because of his liberal use of imagery drawn from sources familiar to all human experience.”**

Though Rumi’s work is clearly grounded in devotion to God, the imagery he weaves throughout his work conveys universal human experiences that transcend religious dogma. He uses metaphor and imagery to describe the spiritual journey in terms of intoxication, wine, and taverns. Imagery of the sea describes the limitless potential of the human soul. Imagery of light in the form of fire, candles, and flame describes love, passion, and pain. Imagery of mirrors reflects our true nature, self-knowledge, and truth.

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<sup>9</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

Because Rumi believes experience of the Divine is beyond all reason and intellect, and we cannot, therefore, use the rational mind to describe or experience the Divine, he uses raw, sometimes profane, imagery of everyday life to equate our need for the Divine with our basic needs of food, shelter, and sex. The familiarity makes this symbolism easy to grasp and gives us a way to jump from the safety of explainable reality to the sometimes discomfoting world of experience.

**“...a longing for the *Divine* can also be the human desire for deep connection, meaning, or unconditional Love.”**

However, one does not have to be a believer to experience Love and longing, embark on a journey of self-discovery, or feel a connection with others and the natural world. For example, a longing for the Divine can also be the human desire for deep connection, meaning, or unconditional Love. Rumi’s poem “The Reed Flute’s Song” describes this longing through the imagery of a reed cut from its source and turned into a flute. The reed embodies the pain of separation from its source:

*“Since I was cut from the reed bed, I have made this crying sound. Anyone apart from someone he loves understands what I say.”*

Self-discovery, *Inner Jihad*, can be as much about the journey toward the Divine as it can be about taming the *Ego*, breaking down internal barriers, or realizing one's authentic potential—his insight speaks to abandoning convention and following what you are called to do, spiritual or secular:

*“You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop highlights the soul's boundlessness. Run from what's comfortable. Forget safety. Live where you fear to live.”*



In Rumi's world, material possessions are dust that prevents us from remembering our rootedness in spirit; the constant craving for more objects, wealth, or status is the scorpion pit of desire. Material possessions are also idols that we sculpt and to which we give our power, which leads us to distraction and unattainable fantasy. In other words, we fail to realize that we already possess the jewels. Our pursuit of meaning and fulfillment is not unlike a hapless search for that which we already have but do not see or refuse to acknowledge.

*“You wander from room to room hunting for the diamond necklace that is already around your neck!”*

Rumi believes in an essential reality from which we all originate—the ocean of oneness. To align ourselves in unity with the Beloved in this “ocean” is to enable our own transformation. In a secular sense, we might call this aligning with our Higher Self. Whatever we choose to call the source, alignment is how we satisfy our longing for connection to that which is greater than ourselves. For this to occur, we must purify our hearts by focusing on a return to our essence, this ocean of oneness. Although each individual's journey is as unique as the individual itself, the destination is more or less the same. It requires us to embrace bewilderment, learn to see with new eyes, and surrender to a unifying force of nature (the Divine or a higher knowing).

**“Material possessions are also idols that we sculpt and to which we give our power, which leads us to distraction and unattainable fantasy.”**

Embracing bewilderment, that sense of wonder and awe, requires the courage to risk the death of *Ego*. Radical Love is a commitment to living a spirit-centered life instead of an ego-centered life, practiced through observation and contemplation.

Learning to see with new eyes requires observation without judgment. Radical Love is a willingness to see things for the duality they are, not what we want or expect them to be—the simplicity and complexity in nature, the gentleness and harshness of life. “Seeing” is not done only through the eyes, however. We must use the power of all our senses.

**“Radical Love is a willingness to see things for the *duality* they are, not what we want or expect them to be...”**

Because the word carries negative connotations, “surrender” may be the most challenging action of Radical Love. We might interpret surrender as giving up or giving in; however, in Rumi’s view, surrender is giving up our biases and prejudicial thoughts and ideas, and giving in to what exists and to that which we cannot change or control. It is accepting creation for what it is. Radical Love is surrendering our need to control and label according to our own biases.

## Reclaiming Radicalism

In a world of increasing chaos and disorder, of shifting cultural trends, and blurring lines of acceptable behavior, lovers of the Divine must reclaim radicalism as the key to humanity’s salvation. We must recognize the veils we erect within us that obscure Love. Moreover, we must have the courage to love radically by changing the way we understand ourselves and our relationships with—and to—one another.

**“..., we must have the courage to love radically by changing the way we understand ourselves and our relationships with—and to—one another.”**

Rumi asks us to reconnect with our purpose by engaging with the world through expressions of creativity or spirituality, not through the intellect.

*“Today, like every other day, we wake up empty and frightened. Don't open the door to the study and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument. Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”*

Intellect has its place. We use it to provide our basic needs and operate in a civil society. But what truly brings us joy? What “instruments” do we possess—our gifts—that, when used appropriately, help move us along our purposeful path? In what ways can we kneel and kiss the ground? How can we practice our gifts in ways that not only enable our own transformation through sacred purpose but also help others find and walk their own path of purpose?

We must also pay attention to our quality of being while performing tasks, from the mundane to the extraordinary. The quality sets an internal tone—for better or worse—and affects our relationships and interactions. It affects how we move in the world. For example, anger might suffuse our purpose with resentment; gratitude with contentment; fear with abandonment of purpose; love with commitment to purpose. Refuse to wake empty and frightened and instead radically depart from habits of the mind by finding moments to become still. Listen and discover your purpose. Use the creative mind, or spirit, to address challenges or contemplate a situation. Pursue, even in small measures, the beauty you want to create in your life.

Suffering is a complex and universal experience falling roughly into two basic categories: the inevitable, such as the pain of loss, illness, or injury, and the optional, which is self-induced mental anguish for any variety of reasons. The latter essentially serves the Ego and is sometimes necessary to get us back on track to wholeness. However, choosing to remain in suffering rather than using it as a vehicle for self-examination and transformation is a form of imprisonment.

**“... , *anger* might suffuse our *purpose* with *resentment*; *gratitude* with *contentment*; *fear* with *abandonment* of purpose; *love* with *commitment* to purpose.”**

Rumi likens suffering to the soul being shackled, and criticizes human affection for suffering as our fondness for our prison. However, this very suffering is the key to our survival if synthesized appropriately. Radical hate grounds us in suffering by appointing blame where none exists: “They” prevent our happiness, take our resources, our jobs, and sometimes our lives. Blaming is a form of voluntary suffering that keeps us shackled. For Rumi, when we blame, we avoid seeing our own faults, our inner mirror. We can try cleaning the mirror, but the smudge remains on our own face.

Unfortunately, people can find belonging and connection in a shared practice of radical hate, even radical doubt. It is an easy trap because it requires little more than surrendering to *Ego* rather than to Love, the latter of which we erect barriers to. For Rumi, the fact that we have a strong desire for connection, this longing, is proof that the Divine exists in the first place. The more radical—and challenging—task is to seek a return to this Divine source, grounding our strong desire for belonging and connection in Love, not suffering, blame, or hate.

By allowing emptiness or fear to dominate our thoughts and guide our actions, we become disconnected from others and from our true nature. For Rumi, longing is not a state of being needing to be fixed. When our hearts cry out, it is a longing to escape the trappings of *Ego* and the material world. The cry itself becomes a rope from The Divine, pulling us out of the well of despair, as it did for Nasuh in “The Story of Nasuh.”

Practicing Radical Love re-orientes our longing for connection by acknowledging and sitting with fear and learning to be comfortable with the uncomfortable rather than trying to resolve it. Radical Love enables us to meet doubt with grace rather than trying to erase it or demand answers. Crying out, literally or figuratively, can satisfy our longing by guiding us out of self-imposed suffering and toward connection with ourselves and others. Radical hate is such a cry. How we answer those who cry out is a telltale sign of our commitment, or lack thereof, to practicing Radical Love.

***“Crying out, literally or figuratively, can satisfy our longing by guiding us out of self-imposed suffering and toward connection with ourselves and others.”***

## **A New (Old) World View**

We live in times of unprecedented rapid change, largely brought about by technological advances that have increasingly led to disconnection from ourselves, one another, and the natural world. Such radical change, especially one we could never have anticipated, not only instills fear but can also make us question our purpose. Radical change can also intensify, in some cases, our longing for the past, even if it was not that great, or, worse, never really existed. Change by its very nature is disruptive.

Radical change is overwhelming and threatening, especially after we have been lulled into a relative sense of stability in America since the end of the Cold War. Radical change can pull us in directions we may not otherwise have considered. It can tempt us to find scapegoats to blame for the change we cannot control. Radicalism grounded in fear or hate may redirect purpose toward divisiveness, disrupting families, communities, and nations. Rumi says that possibility is the default state of the universe because of the infinite nature of the Divine. It follows, therefore, that radical change can also open doors to grander possibilities—ones that do not need to entertain hate.

Our contemporary state of affairs is not new. Humanity has been sent teachers, philosophers, and poets to help guide us toward a “new” world order, one that has developed since Man began contemplating the nature of our existence. How do we redirect our choices toward existential and evolutionary sustainability, toward trust in infinite potential?

***“Radicalism grounded in fear or hate may redirect purpose toward divisiveness, disrupting families, communities, and nations.”***

If you have a spiritual practice, transcend the dogma of religion in favor of what your deepest heart is telling you. If you do not have a spiritual practice, transcend what society tells you and treat with healthy skepticism those who strongly purport to know the “truth.” With or without a spiritual practice, always question and always stay curious. Nothing and everything are what they seem; this is the “both and” state of mind that embraces all opinions and recognizes differing experiences. Move beyond words and rules to allow an experience to unfold as it is, not as you want it to be or think it should be. Practice rigorous self-examination and begin replacing undesirable traits such as pride, envy, and judgment with humility, compassion, and patience.

Engage in community contemplation of what it means to be human, of what it might look like to reach our full potential, and what our Higher Self might become. Discover ways to remember the source of life or create your own rituals for honoring the source you identify with. Rumi engaged in this daily remembrance practice of *dhikr*. For the secular, remembrance might involve paying reverence to your Higher Self, dissolving *Ego*, and redirecting your focus from the idols of the physical world toward an eternal Reality.



Radical Love is the gateway to transcending *Ego* and self-interest. Caring for others' well-being helps us find a greater purpose, a key component of human flourishing and mental health. Conversely, when we lead with our minds and not our hearts, we become imprisoned by false beliefs about ourselves and others. We need to understand the limitations of the rational mind, including the false belief that we must earn love and worthiness rather than recognizing that we already have them. When we listen to the chatter of the mind instead of the stillness of our heart, we are caught up in the habit of comparing ourselves to others, as lessers or superiors, neither of which is true. A non-ordinary state of consciousness, Radical Love requires acknowledging that we are all Divine Love. To embrace the Divine is to embrace inclusivity, to gain an understanding of the Unity of Existence, and to know with the heart that we are all Other.

**“To embrace the *Divine* is to embrace *inclusivity*, to gain an understanding of the *Unity of Existence*, and to know with the *heart* that we are all *Other*.”**

Are we doomed to repeat the past in an unbroken chain of conflict, separated by periods of transient stability, where discord is the recurring global norm? There is another path that involves the will to move beyond treating our interactions and relationships as purely transactional: What can I get out of this for myself? When we stop seeing love as transactional, it morphs into a state of being. This Radical Love is at the heart of Rumi's work. It is not time-bound or culture-bound. When we finally surrender to Radical Love, we will stop repeating our history of cyclical chaos and enter into a new age of being. For Rumi, Love is the “Supreme Musician, ...always playing in our souls.” Let us take down our instruments and play. Let us find radically different—loving—ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

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## About the CFG

The Center for Faith, Identity, and Globalization (CFG) is the interdisciplinary research and publication unit of Rumi Forum. CFG contributes to the knowledge and research at the intersection of faith, identity, and globalization by generating academically-informed analyses and facilitating scholarly exchanges. CFG's spectrum of themes will cover contemporary subjects that are relevant to our understanding of the connection between faith, identity, and globalization, such as interfaith engagement, religious nationalism, conflict resolution, globalization, religious freedom, and spirituality.

## About the Contributor

Sarah (S.A.) Snyder is a writer, storyteller, and conservationist whose work examines the intersections of spirituality, nature, and self-renewal within contemporary cultural and ethical discourse. With more than three decades of professional writing experience, she brings an interdisciplinary perspective to questions of meaning, compassion, and human responsibility in an increasingly fragmented world. She is the author of *The Value of Your Soul: Rumi Verse for Life's Annoying Moments*, *Plant Trees, Carry Sheep: A Woman's Spiritual Journey Among the Sufis of Scotland*, and *DIY Solo Retreats: A Handbook to Creating your Space and Setting your Intention*, and *Getting the Self Care You Deserve*, and the creator of *Luna River Voices*, a reflective platform engaging themes of spirituality, ecological awareness, and personal renewal. Her writing is informed by sustained engagement with Sufi thought as well as academic training in biology and environmental journalism, allowing her to bridge spiritual inquiry, narrative practice, and ecological consciousness with clarity and depth.

**Ideas at their best  
when they interact.**



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