

The Guest House (Rumi)

Translated by Coleman Barks

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honourably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Discussion Guide

For Beaches Sangha

The poem, in brief: Rumi describes human existence as a guest house, where each morning brings a new, unexpected arrival - joy, sorrow, meanness, a flash of awareness. Every guest is to be welcomed, even those that arrive as a sweeping crowd of sorrows that clears the house bare, because each one may be making room for something new. The poem closes by framing even the painful guests as guides sent from beyond, deserving gratitude.

Discussion Questions

- **The metaphor.** Why a guest house rather than a fortress or garden? What does hospitality add that control or cultivation wouldn't?
- **Welcome vs. act.** Rumi asks us to welcome even "meanness" as a guest — not to act on it. What's the difference between welcoming a feeling and acting from it?
- **Equanimity, not indifference.** Rumi's welcome is active — met laughing at the door — not passive tolerance. How does that distinguish equanimity from mere numbness?
- **The theological edge.** The poem ends by naming difficult guests as guides sent from beyond. A secular reading keeps the practice (meet it, learn from it) but drops the sender. Does the poem still hold without that layer?
- **Bringing it home.** Think of a guest that visited you this week - an emotion, a memory, an intrusive thought. How did you actually greet it at the door?

Paired teaching: The Second Arrow

From the Sallatha Sutta: the Buddha teaches that being struck by a first arrow - pain, loss, an unwanted arrival - is often unavoidable. Suffering comes from the second arrow we shoot ourselves: resistance, story-making, self-blame, the refusal to let the first arrow simply be what it is. A practitioner feels the first arrow without adding the second.

The pairing: Rumi's guest arriving at the door is the first arrow - often unchosen, unavoidable. Slamming the door, resenting the guest, or spinning a story about why it shouldn't have come is the second arrow. Welcoming the guest is not the same as liking what it brings; it is declining to add the second arrow.

- **Bridging question.** Where in the poem is Rumi pointing at the first arrow, and where is he pointing at the second? Can you feel the difference in your own recent experience?