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**What is the most compelling thing you have ever read, and how has it changed you or inspired you to take action now, in the past, or in the future?**

There have been many pieces of literature that have influenced my life. Trying to prioritize which source of knowledge has served me best throughout the years is like a fish trying to figure out which drop of water in the ocean was most essential in its survival. For the purpose of this essay I will be sharing with you an excerpt from ‘The Essential Rumi’. A translation of the works of the 12th century poet Rumi by Coleman Barks.

*“All day I think about it, then at night I say it.*

*Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing?*

*I have no idea.*

*My soul is from elsewhere, I’m sure of that,*

*And I intend to end up there.*

*This drunkenness began in some other tavern.*

*When I get back around to that place,*

*I’ll be completely sober. Meanwhile,*

*I’m like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.*

*The day is coming when I fly off,*

*But who is it now in my ear who hears my voice?*

*Who says words with my mouth?*

*Who looks out with my eyes? What is the soul?*

*I cannot stop asking.*

*If I could taste one sip of an answer,*

*I could break out of this prison for drunks.*

*I didn’t come here of my own accord, and I can’t leave that way.*

*Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.*

*This poetry. I never know what I’m going to say.*

*I don’t plan it.*

*When I’m outside the saying of it,*

*I get very quiet and rarely speak at all.*

-The Essential Rumi (pp. 2)

I choose to quote this specific poem because I believe it not only serves as an introduction to the book, but it also summarizes the essentials of Rumi’s teachings. Over the past few years I have embarked on a spiritual quest. I didn’t know it at the moment, but as the time went on and I grew I started realizing I have been making decisions based on a certain longing. A longing for acceptance, for knowledge, for love. Poetry has always been a refuge for me whenever I am feeling lost in the world, but when I found Rumi I found more than a momentary escape. Studying his words I found the cause behind my past actions. This collection of the poet’s work helped me understand that it was ok to want nourishment for the soul. That a person must continually improve themselves by trying to attain knowledge even without knowing what that knowledge may be.

*“Dear soul, if you were not friends*

*with the vast nothing inside,*

*Why would you always be casting your net*

*Into it, and waiting so patiently?*

-The Essential Rumi (pp. 24)

Reading Rumi’s words I found myself slowly analyzing and reliving past events. I learnt to appreciate my strength in enduring things I previously was disappointed in myself at having undergone. I felt pride in decisions that I previously thought had kept me from seizing opportunities because I realized I made those decisions based on my principals. On the other hand I also learnt to be critical of myself. By understanding what kind of person I would like to be I was able to take note of the wrong decisions I have made and I am now able to prevent myself from making them again. In short, *‘The Essential Rumi’* has been instrumental in helping me better myself. I hope the few words I have quoted here will pique your interest and maybe we can discuss Rumi around campus. I look forward to continuing my personal growth with Rumi strengthening my heart and the staff at Mason expanding my mind.

*“There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,*

*As a child in school memorizes facts and concepts*

*From books and from what the teacher says,*

*Collecting information from the traditional sciences*

*As well as from the new sciences.*

*With such intelligence you rise in the world.*

*You get ranked ahead or behind others*

*In regard to your competence in retaining*

*Information. You stroll with this intelligence*

*In and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more*

*Marks on your preserving tablets.*

*There is another kind of tablet, one*

*Already completed and preserved inside you.*

*A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness*

*In the center of the chest. This other intelligence*

*Does not turn yellow or stagnate. It’s fluid,*

*And it doesn’t move from outside to inside*

*Through the conduits of plumbing-learning.*

*This second knowing is a fountainhead*

*From within you, moving out.*

-The Essential Rumi (pp. 178)