

# I Heard God Laughing

## *Renderings of Hafiz*



by Daniel Ladinsky



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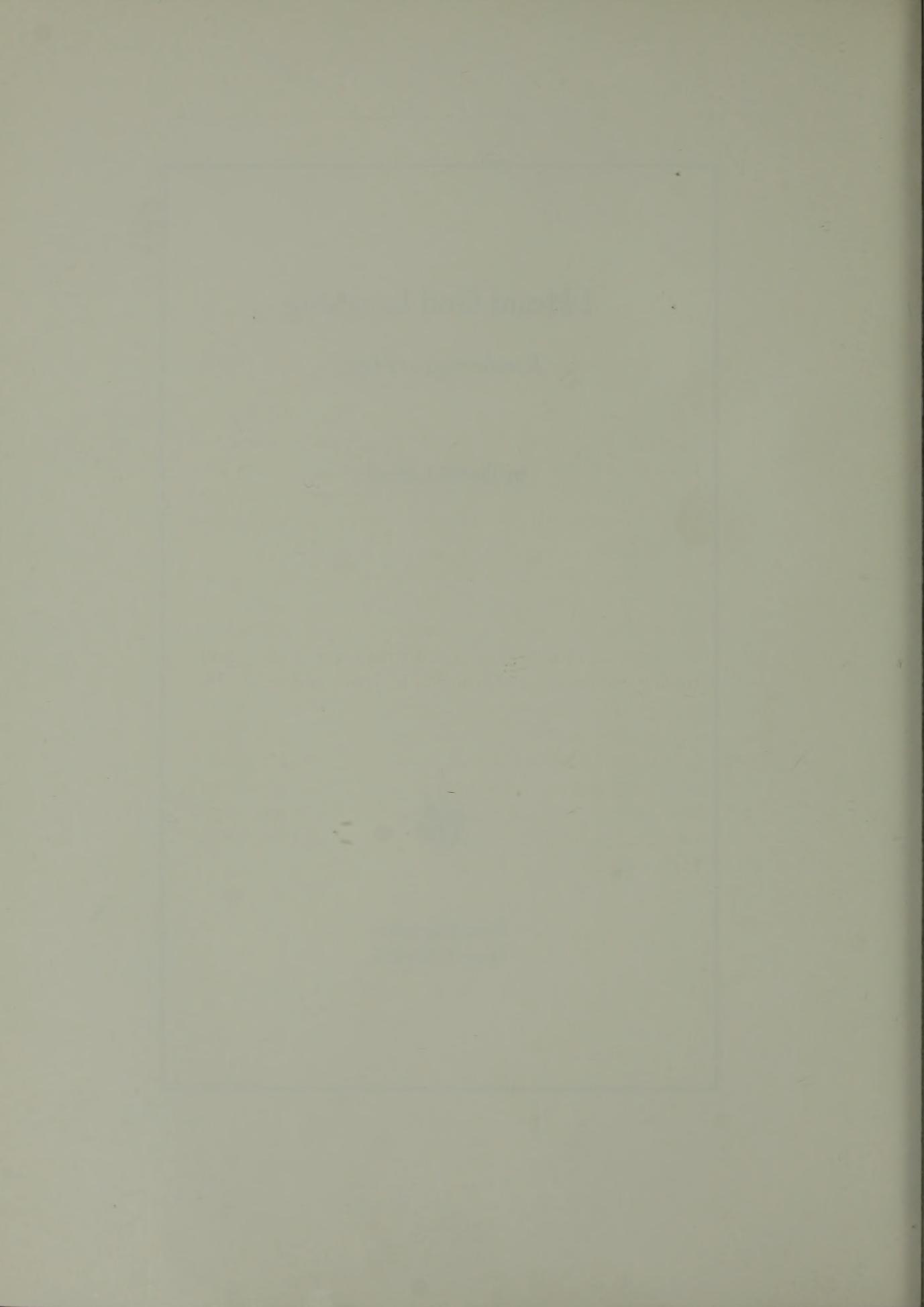
# I Heard God Laughing

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Consulting Editor  
Henry S. Mindlin



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## *Hafiz*

Shams-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz (*c.* 1320–1389), though little known in the Western world, is the most beloved poet of Persia (Iran). To Persians, the poems of Hafiz are not “classical literature” from a remote past, but cherished wisdom from a dear and intimate friend. The special gift of this friend is a poetry unique in world literature, a poetry that celebrates every expression of love in the universe.

The lyrics of Hafiz overflow with a profound appreciation of the beauty and richness of life when seen through the eyes of love. With unerring insight, he explores the feelings and motives associated with every level of love, tracing each nuance of emotion in depth and detail. His poetry outlines the stages of the mystic’s “path of love”—that journey of inner unfolding in which love dissolves personal boundaries and limitations to join larger processes of growth and transformation. Through these processes, human love becomes divine love and the lover merges ultimately with the source and goal of all love, which Hafiz calls the Divine Beloved.



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## *Releasing the Spirit of Hafiz*

My work with Hafiz began on an early morning walk in the countryside of central India, on a beautiful tree-lined road that leads to a place called Meherazad. This small, private residential community near the city of Ahmednagar was the home of the great spiritual Master Avatar Meher Baba until his passing in 1969. A small group of the Master's lifelong companions continue to live and work there, surrounded by a remarkable atmosphere of love.

I was walking with a man whom I have come to know as a teacher, a brother and a friend, a man who had been a member of the Master's circle since the late 1930s. On this particular morning, we were discussing Hafiz, who was Meher Baba's favorite poet. Though Hafiz lived in the fourteenth century, his verses are still immensely popular throughout the Near East and India. His insight and compassion, his subtle, expressive language and his deep reverence for beauty in all its forms have made him a favorite poet of lovers, and especially of lovers of God. The Sufis say that Hafiz loved so fully and so well that he became the living embodiment of Love. Meher Baba called him "a Perfect Master and a perfect poet."

Poetry was in the air at Meherazad that week. The day before our walk, we had listened to a program of marvelous English translations of Rumi, another Persian master poet, who lived a century before Hafiz. Now, as we walked, I turned to my mentor and companion and candidly said, "Compared to those splendid versions of Rumi we heard yesterday, the poetry of Hafiz can appear so *pale* in English! How can this be, when Meher Baba says that Hafiz is such a great poet?" He replied, "Baba has said it is because no one has yet properly translated

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Hafiz!" As soon as he said that, I was surprised to hear myself say, "I can do that!" That night, though I did not (and do not) know the Persian language, I wrote my first version of a Hafiz poem, working from a literal English translation.

For hundreds of years, people have struggled to find ways to reflect in English the sweetness and profundity of Hafiz's poetry. Some translators have tried to reproduce the rhythm, meter and rhyme of the original Persian, often bending and twisting English into strange and unfamiliar configurations to do so. Such careful efforts to honor the *form* of the poetry can sometimes ignore or violate the *spirit* of Hafiz—a spirit of infinite tenderness and compassion, of great exuberance, joy and laughter, of ecstatic love and fervent longing for his Beloved, and of wonder and delight at the divine splendor of the universe. I wanted to find ways to release that spirit in our own language.

The poems of Hafiz are mostly short love songs called *ghazals*, each one about the length of a sonnet. Scholars disagree about the exact number of poems that can be authenticated, but there are no more than eight hundred. Compared to Rumi and others, this is a tiny body of work. However, Hafiz created his poetry in a way that permits many kinds of interpretation. Persian is a flexible and mutable language, and Hafiz was an absolute master of it. Persian-speaking friends say that in some of his poems each *word* can have seven or eight shades of meaning and a variety of interpretations. A single couplet can be translated many different ways, and each one would be "right."

I quickly discovered that even in English, a single Hafiz poem, often a single couplet, could be approached from many points of view. A single stanza of Hafiz could generate whole families of independent poems in English, each exploring some aspect of the original. One might call the results "renderings" or renditions of Hafiz, rather than "translations." To "render" an artistic work means to interpret, to express, to realize. The word can also mean "surrendering" and "yielding"—in this case, opening to the guidance of the spirit contained

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within the poetry. Thus my poems are not “translations” in any traditional sense. They are not intended to be literal or scholarly or even “accurate.” But I hope they are True—faithful to the living spirit of this divine poet.

These “renderings” are based on a remarkable translation of Hafiz by H. Wilberforce Clarke, originally published in 1891. I work from a beautiful two-volume, 1011-page edition of Clarke’s work, recently republished in Iran. I also borrow and shape ideas and thoughts from a few of the many other available translations of Hafiz. A Select Bibliography of sources is included at the end of this book along with information about the life of Hafiz and the background of his poetry.

It is my understanding that when Hafiz created his poems, he often spoke them or sang them spontaneously and his companions wrote the verses down later. Even if one does not know Persian, it is easy to appreciate the rhythm and music of his “playful verse” when one hears it recited aloud. Many of his poems were set to popular tunes, and they are still sung now, six hundred years later, all over the East. Several of these English renderings have already inspired new songs of Hafiz for the West by many gifted musicians. I’m sure Hafiz would be delighted. These poems are meant to be recited, sung, even happily shouted—if it won’t disturb the neighbors too much!

What can I say to my dear Master, Meher Baba, for all his help and guidance? Whatever truth, beauty, laughter and charm you may find here, I would say is a gift from him, the Avatar.

May these poems inspire us to give the great gift of kindness—to ourselves and to others.

Daniel Ladinsky  
February 25, 1996





May these poems help reveal the Truth  
Of God's Divine Playfulness and Light  
And His Sublime Intimacy with us.





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## Poetic Conventions

Hafiz uses a few Persian literary devices that may initially confuse Western readers:

In some poems, Hafiz is like a playwright who is acting all the parts: the lover, the disciple, the Master and Guide, the voice of God, sometimes even the reader. Often *I*, *you*, *he* or *she*, and *Hafiz* refer to the same person.

He frequently includes his name, Hafiz, in at least one stanza. This was a method of “signing” the poem, as one might sign a letter to a friend or as an artist might sign a painting.

Hafiz uses a technical vocabulary to write about stages of spiritual unfolding. Fortunately, his images are so vivid and real that one does not need to understand the mysticism to recognize the experience. In essence, all mysticism deals with processes of love and the ways in which one joins God through love. For Hafiz, the focus of love is often a Master of Love, described as a Luminous Figure, *Pir* (Friend), or sometimes the Tavern-keeper, the one who pours Love’s Wine. The Master puts the student on intimate terms with God, who is called the Friend, the Beloved, the Beautiful One.





## *You Are with the Friend Now*

Hafiz describes some of the preparations required for the inner “Journey of Love.” He urges us to let go of habitual negative attitudes and unnecessary attachments, which only weigh us down. To make this Journey, we must be light, happy and free to go Dancing!

*“I wish I could show you,  
When you are lonely or in darkness,  
The Astonishing Light  
Of your own Being!”*





## *A Divine Invitation*

You have been invited to meet  
The Friend.

No one can resist a Divine Invitation.

That narrows down all our choices  
To just two:

We can come to God  
Dressed for Dancing,

Or

Be carried on a stretcher  
To God's Ward.





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## *You Don't Have to Act Crazy Anymore*

You don't have to act crazy anymore—  
We all know you were good at that.

Now retire, my dear,  
From all that hard work you do

Of bringing pain to your sweet eyes and heart.

Look in a clear mountain mirror—  
See the Beautiful Ancient Warrior  
And the Divine elements  
You always carry inside

That infused this Universe with sacred Life  
So long ago

And join you Eternally  
With all Existence—with God!





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*We Should Talk about This Problem*

There is a Beautiful Creature  
Living in a hole you have dug.

So at night  
I set fruit and grains  
And little pots of wine and milk  
Beside your soft earthen mounds,

And I often sing.

But still, my dear,  
You do not come out.

I have fallen in love with Someone  
Who hides inside you.

We should talk about this problem—

Otherwise,  
I will never leave you alone.





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*And Applaud*

Once a young man came to me and said,

“Dear Master,  
I am feeling strong and brave today,  
And I would like to know the truth  
About all of my—attachments.”

And I replied,

“Attachments?  
Attachments!

Sweet Heart,  
Do you really want me to speak to you  
About all your attachments,

When I can see so clearly  
You have built, with so much care,  
Such a great brothel  
To house all of your pleasures.

You have even surrounded the whole damn place  
With armed guards and vicious dogs  
To protect your desires

So that you can sneak away  
From time to time  
And try to squeeze light  
Into your parched being  
From a source as fruitful  
As a dried date pit  
That even a bird  
Is wise enough to spit out.



Your attachments! My dear,  
Let's not speak of those,

For Hafiz understands the sufferings  
Of your heart.

Hafiz knows  
The torments and the agonies  
That every mind on the way to Annihilation in the Sun  
Must endure.

So at night in my prayers I often stop  
And ask a thousand angels to join in  
And Applaud,

And Applaud  
Anything,  
Anything in this world  
That can bring your heart comfort!"





## *Manic Screaming*

We should make all spiritual talk  
Simple today:

God is trying to sell you something,  
But you don't want to buy.

That is what your suffering is:

Your fantastic haggling,  
Your manic screaming over the price!



## *My Brilliant Image*

One day the sun admitted,

I am just a shadow.  
I wish I could show you  
The Infinite Incandescence (*Tej*)

That has cast my brilliant image!

I wish I could show you,  
When you are lonely or in darkness,

The Astonishing Light

Of your own Being!





## *Cast All Your Votes for Dancing*

I know the voice of depression  
Still calls to you.

I know those habits that can ruin your life  
Still send their invitations.

But you are with the Friend now  
And look so much stronger.

You can stay that way  
And even bloom!

Keep squeezing drops of the Sun  
From your prayers and work and music  
And from your companions' beautiful laughter.

Keep squeezing drops of the Sun  
From the sacred hands and glance of your Beloved  
And, my dear,  
From the most insignificant movements  
Of your own holy body.

Learn to recognize the counterfeit coins  
That may buy you just a moment of pleasure,  
But then drag you for days  
Like a broken man  
Behind a farting camel.



You are with the Friend now.  
Learn what actions of yours delight Him,  
What actions of yours bring freedom  
And Love.

Whenever you say God's name, dear pilgrim,  
My ears wish my head was missing  
So they could finally kiss each other  
And applaud all your nourishing wisdom!

O keep squeezing drops of the Sun  
From your prayers and work and music  
And from your companions' beautiful laughter  
  
And from the most insignificant movements  
Of your own holy body.

Now, sweet one,  
Be wise.  
Cast all your votes for Dancing!





## *Come to My House*

Hafiz introduces himself as Companion and Guide, Friend and Lover. He invites us to share his life, his wine and his heart, to see ourselves and the world through his eyes. If we didn't know better, we would think he was courting us — and perhaps he is!

*"If your cellar is empty,  
This whole Universe  
Could drink forever  
From mine!"*





## *What Happens*

What happens when your soul  
Begins to awaken  
    Your eyes  
    And your heart  
    And the cells of your body  
To the great Journey of Love?

First there is wonderful laughter  
    And probably precious tears  
  
And a hundred sweet promises  
    And those heroic vows  
    No one can ever keep.

But still God is delighted and amused  
    You once tried to be a saint.

What happens when your soul  
Begins to awake in this world  
  
    To our deep need to love  
    And serve the Friend?

O the Beloved  
    Will send you  
One of His wonderful, wild companions—  
  
    Like Hafiz.





*Someone Who Can Kiss God*

Come to my house late at night —  
Do not be shy.  
Hafiz will be barefoot and dancing.

I will be  
In such a grand and generous mood!

Come to my door at any hour,  
Even if your eyes  
Are frightened by my light.  
My heart and arms are open  
And need no rest —  
They will always welcome you.

Come in, my dear,  
From that harsh world  
That has rained elements of stone  
Upon your tender face.

Every soul  
Should receive a toast from us  
For bravery!

Bring all the bottles of wine you own  
To this divine table — the earth  
We share.

If your cellar is empty,  
This whole Universe  
Could drink forever  
From mine!



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Let's dine tonight with exquisite music.  
I might even hire angels  
To play—just for you.

Look!  
Hidden beneath your feet  
Is a Luminous Stage  
Where we are meant to rehearse  
Our Eternal Dance!

And what is the price of my Divine Instruction?  
What could I ask of you?

All I could ever want  
Is that  
You have the priceless company  
Of Someone  
Who can Kiss God,

That you have the priceless gift  
Of becoming a servant to the Friend!

Come to my window, dear world —  
Why ever be shy?

Look inside my playful Verse,  
For Hafiz is Barefoot and Dancing  
And in such a Grand and Generous —  
In such a Fantastic Mood.





### *Would You Think It Odd?*

Would you think it odd if Hafiz said,

“I am in love with every church  
And mosque  
And temple  
And any kind of shrine

Because I know it is there  
That people say the different names  
Of the One God.”

Would you tell your friends  
I was a bit strange if I admitted

I am indeed in love with every mind  
And heart and body.

O I am sincerely  
Plumb crazy  
About your every thought and yearning  
And limb

Because, my dear,  
I know  
That it is through these  
That you search for Him.





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### *Someone Calls Your Name*

Someone calls your name in a crowd,  
And Hafiz, too, begins to look around.

You receive a piece of  
Hoped-for foreign mail,  
And Hafiz, too,  
Becomes so excited to open it.

You lie down with a lover  
After many days apart,  
And Hafiz will close his eyes  
When things get bare and moving,  
If you ask.

My dear, there is something  
You should think about and that is:

If just an old sweeper of the Tavern  
Can truly be so near  
And intimate with you,  
How extraordinary  
Must be your relationship  
With — *God, God, God!*





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### *The Jeweler*

If a naive and desperate man  
Brings a precious stone  
To the only jeweler in town,  
Wanting to sell it,

The jeweler's eyes  
Will begin to play a game,  
Like most eyes in the world when they look at you.

The jeweler's face will stay calm.  
He will not want to reveal the stone's true value,  
But to hold the man captive to fear and greed  
While he calculates  
The value of the transaction.

But one moment with me, my dear,  
Will show you  
That there is nothing,  
Nothing  
Hafiz wants from you.

When you sit before a Master like me,  
Even if you are a drooling mess,  
My eyes sing with Excitement—  
They see your Divine Worth.





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*Saints Bowing in the Mountains*

Do you know how beautiful you are?

I think not, my dear.

For as you talk of God,  
I see great parades with wildly colorful bands  
Streaming from your mind and heart,  
Carrying wonderful and secret messages  
To every corner of this world.

I see saints bowing in the mountains  
Hundreds of miles away  
To the wonder of sounds  
That break into light  
From your most common words.

Speak to me of your mother,  
Your cousins and your friends.

Tell me of squirrels and birds you know.  
Awaken your legion of nightingales —  
Let them soar wild and free in the sky

And begin to sing to God.  
Let's all begin to sing to God!

Do you know how beautiful you are?

I think not, my dear,

Yet Hafiz  
Could set you upon a Stage  
And worship you forever!





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*Exquisitely Woven*

Wayfarer,  
Your body is my prayer carpet,  
For I can see in your eyes  
That you are exquisitely woven  
With the finest silk and wool  
And that Pattern upon your soul  
Has the signature of God  
And all your moods and colors of love  
Come from His Divine vats of dye and  
Gold.

Wayfarer,  
Your body is my shrine.  
If you had the eyes of a *Pir*,  
You would see Hafiz  
Kneeling by your side,  
Humming playful tunes  
And shedding joyful tears  
Upon your wondrous hidden Crown.





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*The Moon Is Also Busy*

I bow to God in gratitude,  
And I find the moon is also busy  
Doing the same.

I bow to God in great happiness,  
And I learn from where the suns  
And the children  
And my heart  
All borrow their Light.

I bow to the Friend in deep reverence  
And discover a marvelous secret carried in the air:

This whole Universe is just as blessed  
And divinely crazed as I,  
And just as lost in this Wonderful Holy Dance.

My dear,  
After such a long, long journey,  
God has made another soul  
Free!

Now all Hafiz wants to do  
Is open a beautiful Tavern  
Where this Sacred Wine  
Of God's Truth, Knowledge and Love  
Is forever and ever  
Freely offered to you.

O bow to God in gratitude,  
And some day  
You will see how  
The moon is also busy doing the same.





## *We All Sit in God's Classroom*

Hafiz tells us that Love's Journey unfolds through every process of life. Divine principles are constantly being demonstrated all around us. We cannot learn them through words or books or limited systems of human values. Hafiz says God is fully known only through love, which accepts *everything*. Love reveals the Universe as a cosmic playground where every thing and being participates in a single, magnificent Game.

*"God has shouted 'Yes! Yes! Yes!'  
To every luminous movement in Existence."*





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*For a While*

We have all come to the right place.  
We all sit in God's classroom.

Now,  
The only thing left for us to do, my dear,  
Is to stop  
Throwing spitballs for a while.

*Why Carry?*

Hafiz,  
Why carry a whole load of books  
Upon your back  
Climbing this mountain,  
When tonight,  
Just a few thoughts of God  
Will light the holy fire.





## *Someone Should Start Laughing*

I have a thousand brilliant lies  
For the question:  
How are you?

I have a thousand brilliant lies  
For the question:  
What is God?

If you think that the Truth can be known  
From words,

If you think that the Sun and the Ocean  
Can pass through that tiny opening  
Called the mouth,

O someone should start laughing!

Someone should start wildly Laughing—  
Now!





## *A Golden Compass*

Forget every idea of right and wrong  
Any classroom ever taught you

Because  
An empty heart, a tormented mind,  
Unkindness, jealousy and fear

Are always the testimony  
You have been completely fooled!

Turn your back on those  
Who would imprison your wondrous spirit  
With deceit and lies.

Come, join the honest company  
Of the King's beggars—  
Those gamblers, scoundrels and divine clowns  
And those astonishing fair courtesans  
Who need Divine Love every night.

Come, join the courageous  
Who have no choice  
But to bet their entire world  
That indeed,  
Indeed, God is Real.

I will lead you into the Circle  
Of the Beloved's cunning thieves,  
Those playful royal rogues—  
The ones you can trust for true guidance—  
Who can aid you  
In this Blessed Calamity of life.



Hafiz,  
Look at the Perfect One  
At the Circle's Center:  
  
He Spins and Whirls like a Golden Compass,  
Beyond all that is Rational,  
  
To show this dear world  
  
That Everything,  
Everything in Existence  
Does point to God.



### *Zero*

Zero  
Is where the Real Fun starts.  
  
There's too much counting  
Everywhere else!





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*Circles*

The moon is most happy  
When it is full.

And the sun always looks  
Like a perfectly minted gold coin

That was just Polished  
And placed in flight  
By God's playful Kiss.

And so many varieties of fruit  
Hang plump and round

From branches that seem like a Sculptor's hands.

I see the beautiful curve of a pregnant belly  
Shaped by a soul within,

And the Earth itself,  
And the planets and the Spheres—

I have gotten the hint:

There is something about circles  
The Beloved likes.

Hafiz,  
Within the Circle of a Perfect One

There is an Infinite Community  
Of Light.





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### *The Great Secret*

God was full of Wine last night,  
So full of Wine

That He let a great secret slip.

He said:

*There is no man on this earth  
Who needs a pardon from Me—*

*For there is really no such thing,  
No such thing  
As Sin!*

The Beloved has gone completely Wild—  
He has poured Himself into me!

I am Blissful and Drunk and Overflowing.

Dear world,  
Draw life from my Sweet Body.

Dear wayfaring souls,  
Come drink your fill of liquid rubies,  
For God has made my heart  
An Eternal Fountain!



and the other

the next day  
and the last

was very wet

and the next

was very wet

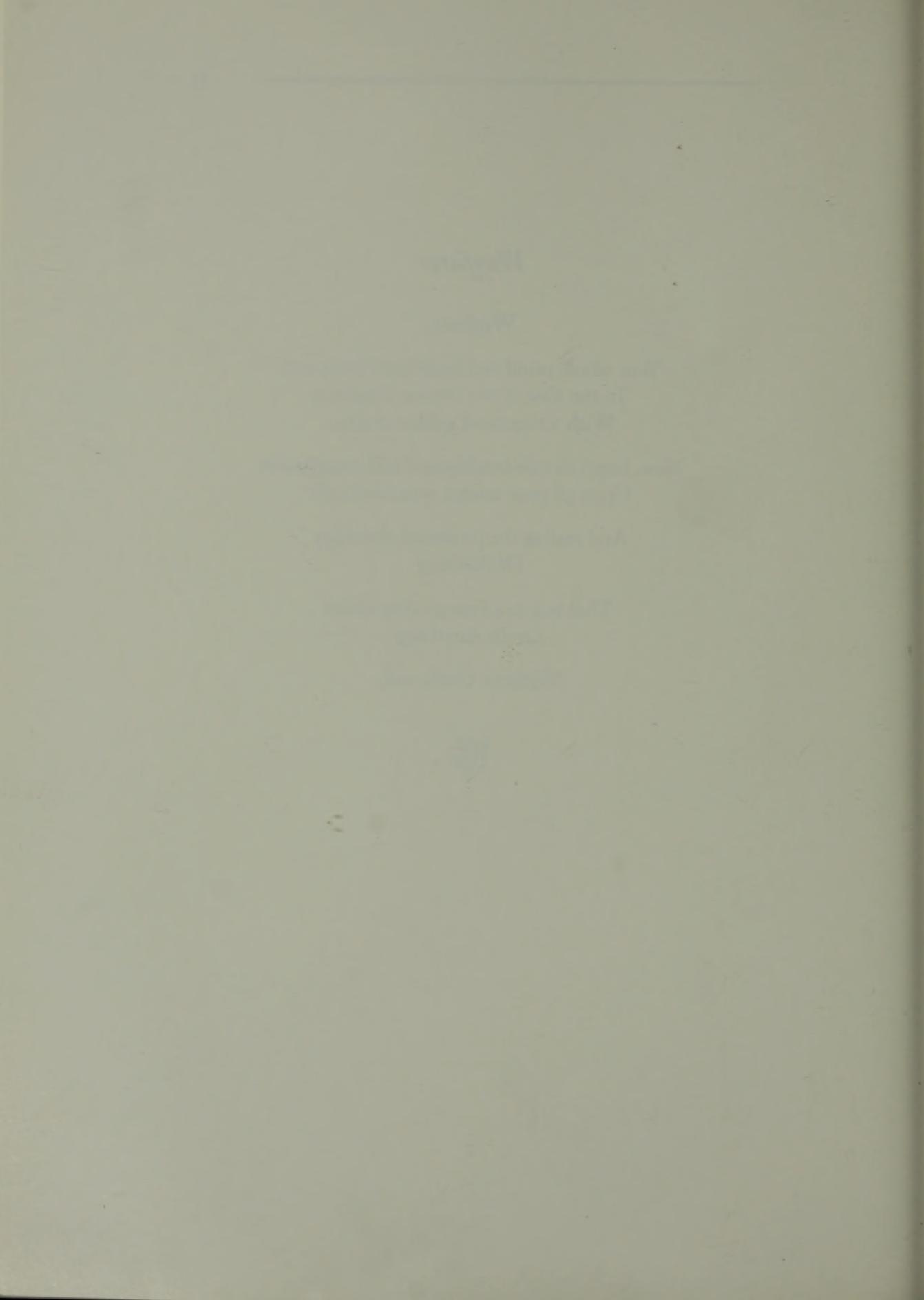
## *Wayfarer*

Wayfarer,

Your whole mind and body have been tied  
To the foot of the Divine Elephant  
With a thousand golden chains.

Now, begin to rain intelligence and compassion  
Upon all your tender, wounded cells  
  
And realize the profound absurdity  
Of thinking  
  
That you can ever go Anywhere  
Or do Anything  
  
Without God's will.





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## *Of Course Things Like That Can Happen*

Once God made love to a great saint  
Who had a hairy belly.

Of course things like that can happen!

And it was a surprise  
Only to the novice on the path  
When the saint's stomach began to swell  
Just like a woman's.

Weeks went by, then months.  
The saint's cheeks  
Turned into beautiful roses.  
He became like a young bride  
Who was carrying a holy child,  
And his gratitude was speechless.  
But his eyes shone  
Like two planets making love.

The town began to stand outside his house  
At night,

For it had come to the attention of the faithful  
That as the moon passed by on its round,  
It would sometimes bend over and kiss his roof!

Of course things like that can happen.

Life went on  
Amidst the other ten thousand wonders:  
Whiskers and weeds and trees and charming babies  
Kept emerging.  
People and cattle and bees worked side by side,  
All sweetly humming.  
And, come lunch,  
All dined on the same Mysterious  
Divine manna of nourishing Love—  
Disguised in a thousand shapes, colors and forms.

and the first half of the second

---

Galaxies gave away their ingenious ideas  
And told us of their private body functions.  
So man, too,  
Eats, burps and excretes more worlds.

How is it that invisible thoughts can lift heavy matter  
And build cities and armies and altars?

All contain a Hidden Strategy  
To be transformed again  
Into Divine Music and Love and Light!

The sun rolls through  
The sky meadows every day,  
And a billion cells run  
To the top of a leaf to scream and applaud  
And smash things in their joy.

Of course things like that can happen.

Rivers stay up all night and chant;  
Luminous fish jump out of the water  
Spitting emeralds at all talk of Heaven  
Being anywhere else but— Right Here!

Clouds pull each other's pants down  
And point and laugh.

O my dear,  
Of course things like that can happen.

For all is written within the Mind  
To help and instruct the dervish  
In dance and romance and prayer.

The stars get clearly drunk  
And crazy at night  
And throw themselves  
Across the sky.



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Only an insane being or compound  
Is not going mad with excitement  
At this Wonderful Performance by God!

And still,  
Light stretches its arms  
Open even more  
And shouts to you, because you are His lover,  
To forget your harsh actions of the past  
And just Dance!

Look! Angels and flowers  
Are playing hooky in graveyards,  
Laughing and rolling naked on cool stones.

Why go to sleep tonight  
Exhausted from the folly of ignorance,  
When even the Beloved is Drunk  
And is doing wonderful, ecstatic somersaults  
And is giving wild lessons between the sheets  
And between His handstands  
All up and down the Tavern floor and ceiling!

Indeed,  
Indeed, things like that can happen.

A few days  
Before the delivery of God's baby,  
The saint had to visit a city close by  
Where few knew of him.

He was walking unnoticed past a mosque,  
And the shouts of God's lovers  
Happened to fill the air, calling,

"Allah, Allah! Where are you?  
Where are You, Beautiful One?"



And the child in the womb of the Master  
 Could not remain silent and shouted back,  
 In an astounding voice,

*I am Here!*  
*I am Here—dear world!*

The crowd in the mosque became frantic,  
 And they picked up shoes, clubs and stones.  
 You know what then happened—  
 The story becomes grim.

But the moon cannot hold a grudge.  
 It still stops by some nights  
 And leans over this gentle earth, as over a crib,  
 And gives a full, wet kiss.

For the moon knows  
 That God is always amorous—

He will never stop making Love,

For the Truth has been Divinely Conceived  
 Deeply within each of us.

O Hafiz,  
 Look at the Splendor of God's Grace:  
 The Sun has been planted in a thousand furrows  
 Across every soul's brow.

Of course, my dear,  
 Everything God and I say  
 Can Happen!





### *The Only One*

From man's perspective  
In this intricate game of love,

It is so easy to become confused  
And think you are the do-er.

But from God's Infinite Certainty,  
He always Knows

That He is the only One  
Who should ever be put on trial.



### *Every Movement*

I rarely let the word "No" escape  
From my mouth

Because it is so plain to my soul

That God has shouted, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"  
To every luminous movement in Existence.





---

*Saheb-e-Zaman*

Just as a normal man can climb  
A high mountain  
And on a clear day  
See for many miles all around,

Hafiz can stand on a blessed peak  
Inside his heart  
And see for hundreds of years  
In all directions.

And I tell you, dear ones,  
That the *Saheb-e-Zaman*,  
The Christ,  
The Prophet,  
The Ancient One,  
Has made a date to Whirl,  
To Whirl  
With this Earth again!





## *Set This Dry, Boring Place on Fire!*

Hafiz seeks to broaden and deepen our understanding of “Real Love,” both in human relationships and in our growing obsession with Divinity. He prods us to explore Love’s possibilities and test its apparent boundaries. He says our progress on this Journey can be measured only by the intensity of our love, the living flame that illuminates all life. Begin to love *now*, he says, don’t wait—let there be no regrets.

*“My heart is a raging volcano  
Of love for you!”*



With regard to myself, I do not

know whether you ought to make me a member of your

new club or not. I have no money to give, but

I have a good deal of time to give, and I am

not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club,

but I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club,

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

I am not at all afraid of being a member of a club.

---

*How Does It Feel to Be a Heart?*

Once a young woman asked me,

“How does it feel to be a man?”

And I replied,

“My dear,  
I am not so sure.”

Then she said,  
“Well, aren’t you a man?”

And this time I replied,

“I view gender  
As a beautiful animal  
That people often take for a walk on a leash  
And might enter in some odd contest  
To try to win strange prizes.

My dear,  
A better question for Hafiz  
Would have been,

‘How does it feel to be a heart?’

For all I know is Love,  
And I find my heart Infinite  
And Everywhere!”



the hill to look at the world

and the sun was setting and I

walked up the hill to look at the world

and the sun was

setting and I

walked up the hill

and the sun was

setting and I

walked up the hill

and the sun was

setting and I

walked up the hill

and the sun was

setting and I

walked up the hill

and the sun was

setting and I

walked up the hill

---

### *If It Is Not Too Dark*

Go for a walk, if it is not too dark.

Get some fresh air, try to smile.

Say something kind

To a safe-looking stranger, if one happens by.

Always exercise your heart's knowing.

You might as well attempt something real

Along this path:

Take your spouse or lover into your arms

The way you did when you first met.

Let tenderness pour from your eyes

The way the Sun gazes warmly on the earth.

Play a game with some children.

Extend yourself to a friend.

Sing a few ribald songs to your pets and plants—

Why not let them get drunk and wild!

Let's toast

Every rung we've climbed on Evolution's ladder.

Whisper, "I love you! I love you!"

To the whole mad world.

Let's stop reading about God—

We will never understand Him.

Jump to your feet, wave your fists,  
Threaten and warn the whole Universe

That your heart can no longer live

Without real love!





---

## *Awake Awhile*

Awake awhile.

It does not have to be  
Forever,  
Right now.

One step upon the Sky's soft skirt  
Would be enough.

Hafiz,  
Awake awhile.  
Just one True moment of Love  
Will last for days.

Rest all your elaborate plans and tactics  
For Knowing Him,  
For they are all just frozen spring buds  
Far,  
So far from Summer's Divine Gold.

Awake, my dear.  
Be kind to your sleeping heart.  
Take it out into the vast fields of Light  
And let it breathe.

Say,  
"Love,  
Give me back my wings.  
Lift me,  
Lift me nearer."

Say to the sun and moon,  
Say to our dear Friend,

"I will take You up now, Beloved,  
On that wonderful Dance You promised!"





## *Dance, Dervish Dance*

Dance, dervish dance—  
Bring the Face of God before you.

Only Love can lift the heart up so high  
That its true Color is restored by the Sun!  
See Him near and clapping,  
That Perfect One who fathers Divine Rhythm.

O dance, dervish dance,  
And know you bring your Master happiness  
Whenever you smile.

Last night,  
So many tears took flight because of Joy  
That the sky got crowded and complained  
When I discovered God hiding again in my heart  
And I could not cease to celebrate.

O dance, Hafiz, dance.  
Write a thousand luminous secrets  
Upon the wall of Existence  
So that even a blind man will know  
Where we are,  
And join us in this Love!

Dance, dervish dance—  
Bring the Face,  
O bring the Face of your Beloved  
Before you!





## *You Better Start Kissing Me*

Throw away  
All your begging bowls at God's door,

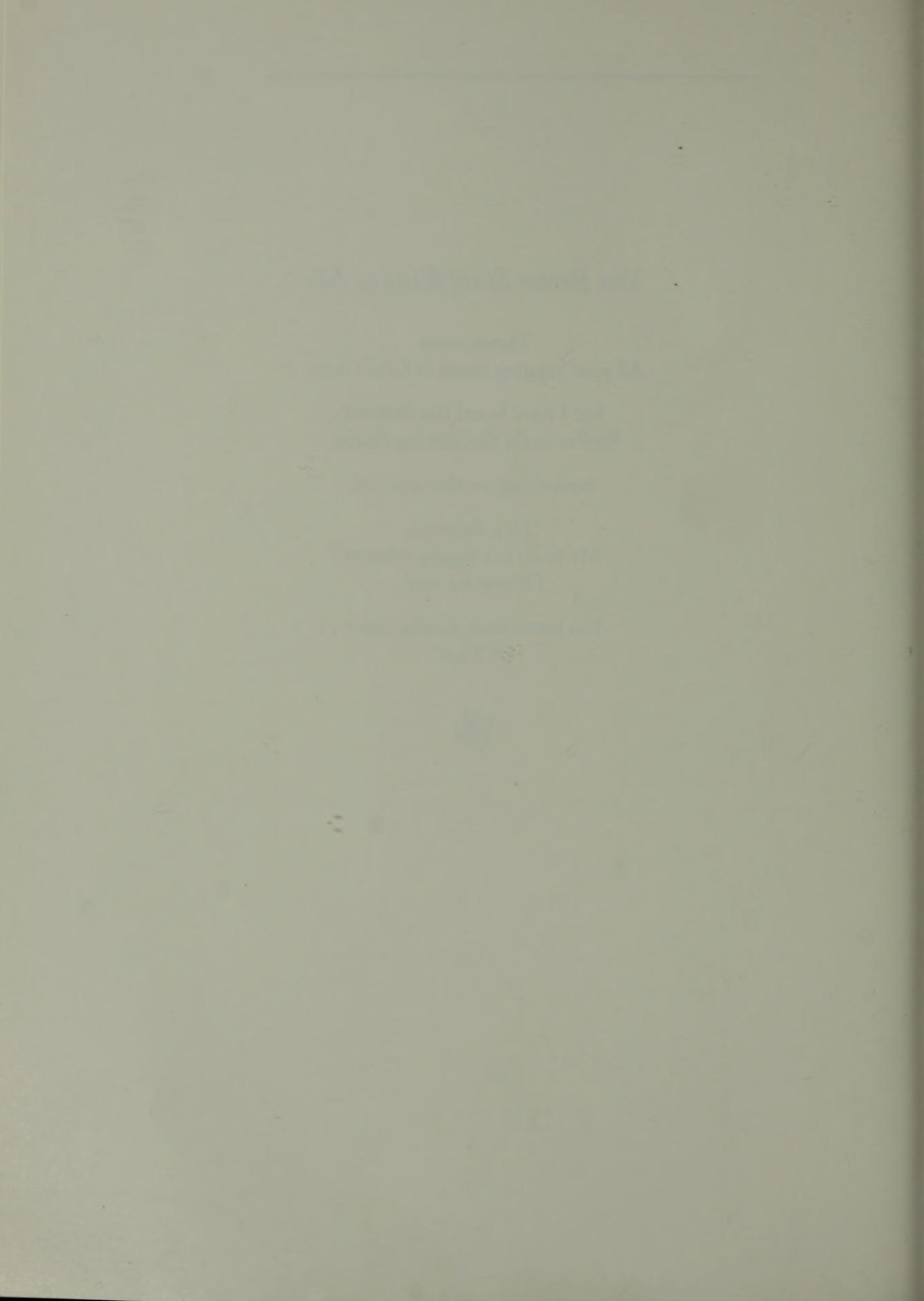
For I have heard the Beloved  
Prefers sweet threatening shouts,

Something on the order of:

"Hey, Beloved,  
My heart is a raging volcano  
Of love for you!"

You better start kissing me—  
Or Else!"





---

*A Barroom View of Love*

I would not want all my words  
To parade around this world  
In pretty costumes,

So I will tell you something  
Of the Barroom view of Love.

Love is grabbing hold of the Great Lion's mane  
And wrestling and rolling deep into Existence

While the Beloved gets rough  
And begins to maul you alive.

True Love, my dear,  
Is putting an ironclad grip upon

The sore, swollen balls  
Of a Divine Rogue Elephant

And  
Not having the good fortune to Die!



and the next moment

you will have had

the same idea

in your mind.

When you first find

the words you want

to express

you will have

the same idea

in your mind.

When you first

find the words

you want

you will have

the same idea

in your mind.

When you first

find the words

you want

you will have

the same idea

in your mind.

When you first

find the words

you want

you will have

the same idea

in your mind.

When you first

find the words

you want

you will have

the same idea

in your mind.

---

*I Know the Way You Can Get*

I know the way you can get  
When you have not had a drink of Love:

Your face hardens,  
Your sweet muscles cramp.  
Children become concerned  
About a strange look that appears in your eyes  
Which even begins to worry your own mirror  
And nose.

Squirrels and birds sense your sadness  
And call an important conference in a tall tree.  
They decide which secret code to chant  
To help your mind and soul.

Even angels fear that brand of madness  
That arrays itself against the world  
And throws sharp stones and spears into  
The innocent  
And into one's self.

O I know the way you can get  
If you have not been out drinking Love:

You might rip apart  
Every sentence your friends and teachers say,  
Looking for hidden clauses.

You might weigh every word on a scale  
Like a dead fish.



---

You might pull out a ruler to measure  
From every angle in your darkness  
The beautiful dimensions of a heart you once  
Trusted.

I know the way you can get  
If you have not had a drink from Love's  
Hands.

That is why all the Great Ones speak of  
The vital need  
To keep Remembering God,  
So you will come to know and see Him  
As being so Playful  
And Wanting,  
Just Wanting to help.

That is why Hafiz says:  
Bring your cup near me,  
For I am a Sweet Old Vagabond  
With an Infinite Leaking Barrel  
Of Light and Laughter and Truth  
That the Beloved has tied to my back.

Dear one,  
Indeed, please bring your heart near me.  
For all I care about  
Is quenching your thirst for freedom!

All a Sane man can ever care about  
Is giving Love!





### *Spill the Oil Lamp!*

Spill the oil lamp!  
Set this dry, boring place on fire!

If you have ever  
Made wanton love with God,

Then you have ignited that brilliant Light inside  
That every person needs.

So—  
Spill the oil!



### *I Am Determined*

One regret, dear world,  
That I am determined not to have  
When I am lying on my deathbed  
Is that  
I did not kiss you enough.





## *Let Me Near You Tonight*

Hafiz speaks of the special love a spiritual student feels for his teacher. The Master becomes the personification of Love and the focus of the student's devotion and longing. This association of spiritual student and teacher can become the most intimate and deeply personal bond of life, closer than husband and wife or parent and child. Hafiz describes the many dimensions of this relationship from the depth of his own experience with his Master.

*"I need to know I am yours, Beloved."*





## *That's the Whole Idea*

Fire has a love for itself—  
It wants to keep burning.

It is like a woman  
Who is at last making love  
To the person she most desires.

Find a Master who is like the Sun.

Go to His house  
In the middle of the night.

Smash a window.  
Act like a great burglar—  
Jump in.

Now,  
Gather all your courage—  
Throw yourself into His bed!

He will probably kill you.

Fantastic—  
That's the whole idea!





## *Keeping Watch*

In the morning  
When I began to wake,  
It happened again—

That feeling  
That You, Beloved,  
Had stood over me all night  
Keeping watch,

That feeling  
That as soon as I began to stir

You put Your lips on my forehead  
And lit a Holy Lamp  
Inside my heart.





---

*You Left a Thousand Women Crazy*

Beloved,  
Last time,  
When You walked through the city  
So Beautiful and Naked,  
You left a thousand women crazy  
And impossible to live with.

You left a thousand married men  
Confused about their gender.

Children ran from their classrooms,  
And teachers were glad You came.

And the sun tried to break out  
Of its royal cage in the sky  
And at last, and at last  
Lay its Ancient Love at Your feet.

And I wish You would have let it,  
So the whole world could have died  
Like Hafiz,

Dancing so happily,  
Filled with Ecstasy and  
Unbearable Divine Light.





### *Something Invisible*

Once I asked my Master,  
“What is the difference  
Between you and me?”

And he replied,  
“Hafiz, only this:

If a herd of wild buffalo  
Broke into our house  
And knocked over  
Our empty begging bowls,  
Not a drop would spill from yours.

But there is Something Invisible  
That God has placed in mine.

If That spilled from my bowl,  
It could drown this whole world.”





### *A Tethered Falcon*

My heart sits on the Arm of God  
 Like a tethered falcon  
 Suddenly unhooded.

I am now blessedly crazed  
 Because my Master's Astounding Effulgence  
 Is in constant view.

My piercing eyes,  
 Which have searched every world  
 For Tenderness and Love,  
 Now lock on the Royal Target—  
 The Wild Holy One  
 Whose Beauty Illuminates Existence.

My soul endures a magnificent longing.

I am a tethered falcon  
 With great wings and sharp talons poised,  
 Every sinew taut, like a Sacred Bow,  
 Quivering at the edge of my Self  
 And Eternal Freedom,

Though still held in check  
 By a miraculous  
 Divine Golden Cord.

Beloved,  
 I am waiting for You to free me  
 Into Your Mind  
 And Infinite Being.

I am pleading in absolute helplessness  
 To hear, finally, your Words of Grace:  
*Fly! Fly into Me!*

Hafiz,  
 Who can understand  
 Your sublime Nearness and Separation?





## *That Full, Fragrant Curl*

Why do I want to get so close to you tonight,  
Dear Master,  
With such a sharp knife in my hand?

I'll confess.  
I have been eyeing that beautiful curl dangling  
At the end of your tress.

I have calculated its worth  
Way into the wee hours.

I have figured  
The price it will bring  
Is the ransom I need to free myself  
From every god my mind and this world  
Have ever erected,  
To free myself from every sterile idol  
That makes me bow to its lies  
And wants to strangle  
My fragile joys and precious winged pen.

I need to know I am yours, Beloved,  
To untangle my every alliance with Guilt.  
When that cruel net casts itself,  
It can cause even a great one  
To live in sorrow and sadness.

So let me near you tonight, dear Master,  
With a sharp knife concealed in my palm.  
Let me cut from your favorite garment  
A tiny thread  
From which I will make a sacred lasso  
To encircle the Sun.



If I could do *that*  
With just a frayed thread,  
Imagine what could happen  
If you let me sever that full, fragrant curl  
That holds this earth like a blue diamond ornament  
Dangling from your ear.

Let it be mine,  
So I might swallow at last  
This tiny sacred object—this world,  
That has caressed your cheek so many times.

Hafiz has learned to sing all night,  
With a divine eloquence and humor,  
To help fill God's artists and seekers  
To the brim.

O let me near you tonight, Beloved,  
With my heart concealed in my hands.

Let me near you,  
And I will place it at your feet forever!





## *Maybe I Could Become a Poet*

Hafiz sometimes speaks about himself in his poems, often in an apparently offhand and bemused way. At first he is puzzled by life. "What kind of work can I do in this world?" he asks. But the more deeply he sees, the more astonished he is to find his Beloved everywhere. He discovers that the essence of life is the expression of beauty—it is Poetry. He arrives at a stage in Love's Journey where everyone becomes a Poet!

*"Start seeing everything as God,  
But keep it a secret."*





### *I Took It as a Sign*

Someone sent a band to my house,  
And it started playing  
At five in the morning.

I took this as a sign  
God wanted me to sing!

Then the moon joined in  
And a few of the tenor-voiced stars,  
And the earth offered its lovely belly  
As a drum.

Before I knew it,  
I realized  
All human beings could be happy  
If they just had a few music lessons  
From a Sweet Old Maestro  
Like Hafiz.





## *Beautiful Empty Pages*

What kind of work  
Can I do in this world?

Who would be kind enough  
To hire an old holy Bum,

One with a great reputation  
For loving the charms  
Of the lawless  
And the wild artists and the lewd?

Maybe I could become a poet.

Maybe the Beloved  
Will make my love so Pure

That He will come to sit upon  
All my Beautiful empty pages.  
And when you come to look at them,

He might kick you  
With His Beautiful Divine Foot.





### *Pulling Out the Chair*

Pulling out the chair  
Beneath your mind  
And watching you fall upon God—

What else is there  
For Hafiz to do  
That is any fun in this world!



### *The Only Sin I Know*

If someone sits with me  
And we talk about the Beloved,

If I cannot give his heart comfort,  
If I cannot make him feel better  
About himself and this world,

Then, Hafiz,  
Quickly run to the mosque and pray—

For you have just committed  
The only sin I know.





---

*There Is a Wonderful Game*

There is a game we should play,  
And it goes like this:

We hold hands and look into each other's eyes  
And scan each other's face.

Then I say,  
"Now tell me a difference you see between us."

And you might respond,  
"Hafiz, your nose is ten times bigger than mine!"

Then I would say,  
"Yes, my dear, almost ten times!"

But let's keep playing.  
Let's go deeper,  
Go deeper.  
For if we do,  
Our spirits will embrace  
And interweave.

Our union will be so glorious  
That even God  
Will not be able to tell us apart.

There is a wonderful game  
We should play with everyone  
And it goes like this . . .





## *I Am So Glad*

Start seeing everything as God,  
But keep it a secret.

Become like a man who is Awestruck  
And Nourished

Listening to a Golden Nightingale  
Sing in a beautiful foreign language  
While God invisibly nests  
Upon its tongue.

Hafiz,  
Who can you tell in this world  
That when a dog runs up to you  
Wagging its ecstatic tail,  
You lean down and whisper in its ear,

“Beloved,  
I am so glad You are happy to see me.

Beloved,  
I am so glad,  
So very glad You have come.”





### *Your Beautiful Parched, Holy Mouth*

A poet is someone  
Who can pour Light into a spoon,  
Then raise it  
To nourish  
Your beautiful parched, holy mouth.





---

*I Will Hire You as a Minstrel*

Take one of my tears,  
Throw it into the ocean

And watch the salt in the wounds  
Of this earth and men begin to disappear.

Take one of my tears  
And cradle it in your palm.  
Mount a great white camel  
And carry my love into every desert,  
Paying homage to every Prophet  
Who has ever walked in our world.

O take one of my tears  
And stop weeping only for sadness,

For there is so much More to this life  
Than you now understand.

Take one of my tears  
And become like the Happy One,  
O like the Happy One—  
Who now lives Forever  
Within me.

When a drop from my Emerald Sea  
Touches your soul's mouth,  
It will dissolve everything but your Joy  
And an Eternal Wonder.



Then,  
The Beloved will gladly hire you  
As His minstrel

To go traveling about this world,  
Letting everyone upon this earth

Hear  
The Beautiful Names of God  
Resound in a thousand chords!

Hafiz himself is singing tonight  
In Resplendent Glory,

For the cup in my heart  
Has revealed the Beloved's Face,  
And I have His oath in writing

That He will never again depart.

O Hafiz, take one of your tears,  
For you are weeping like a golden candle—

Throw one tear into the Ocean of your own verse

And let the wounds  
Of every lover of God who kneels in prayer  
And comes close to your words  
Begin, right now,  
To disappear.





## *God's Laughter*

Hafiz tells us that the Beloved's nature is pure Joy. The closer we come to Him, the more we are able to hear and feel God's Laughter. The rhythm of His Laughter is the music of the dance of life. That music is the essence of Love, and it is the radiant core of every song of Hafiz.

*"I am happy even before I have a reason."*





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### *Several Times in the Last Week*

Ever since Happiness heard your name,  
It has been running through the streets  
Trying to find you.

And several times in the last week,  
God Himself has even come to my door—  
Asking me for your address!

Once I said,  
“God,  
I thought You knew everything.  
Why are You asking me  
Where Your lovers live?”

And the Beloved replied,

*Indeed, Hafiz, I do know Everything—  
But it is fun playing dumb once in a while.  
And I love intimate chat  
And the warmth of your heart's fire.*

Maybe we should make this poem into a song—  
I think it has potential!

How does this refrain sound,  
For I know it is a Truth:

Ever since Happiness heard your name,  
It has been running through the streets  
Trying to find you.

And several times in the last week,  
God Himself has come to my door—  
So sweetly asking for your address,  
Wanting the beautiful warmth of your heart's fire.





## *Laughter*

What is laughter? What is laughter?  
 It is God waking up! O it is God waking up!  
     It is the sun poking its sweet head out  
         From behind a cloud  
     You have been carrying too long,  
         Veiling your eyes and heart.

It is Light breaking ground for a great Structure  
     That is your Real body—called Truth.

It is happiness applauding itself and then taking flight  
     To embrace everyone and everything in this world.

Laughter is the polestar  
     Held in the sky by our Beloved,  
         Who eternally says,

“Yes, dear ones, come this way,  
     Come this way toward Me and Love!

Come with your tender mouths moving  
     And your beautiful tongues conducting songs  
 And with your movements—your magic movements  
     Of hands and feet and glands and cells—Dancing!

Know that to God’s Eye,  
     All movement is a Wondrous Language,  
         And Music—such exquisite, wild Music!”

O what is laughter, Hafiz?  
     What is this precious love and laughter  
         Budding in our hearts?

It is the glorious sound  
     Of a soul waking up!





## *Tripping Over Joy*

What is the difference  
Between your experience of Existence  
And that of a saint?

The saint knows  
That the spiritual path  
Is a sublime chess game with God

And that the Beloved  
Has just made such a Fantastic Move

That the saint is now continually  
Tripping over Joy  
And bursting out in Laughter  
And saying, "I Surrender!"

Whereas, my dear,  
I am afraid you still think  
You have a thousand serious moves.





## *Strange Miracle*

O wondrous creatures,  
By what strange miracle  
Do you so often  
Not smile?



## *Silence*

A day of Silence  
Can be a pilgrimage in itself.

A day of Silence  
Can help you listen  
To the Soul play  
Its marvelous lute and drum.

Is not most talking  
A crazed defense of a crumbling fort?

I thought we came here  
To surrender in Silence,  
  
To yield to Light and Happiness,  
  
To Dance within  
In celebration of Love's Victory!





## *My Sweet, Crushed Angel*

You have not danced so badly, my dear,  
Trying to hold hands with the Beautiful One.

You have waltzed with great style,  
My sweet, crushed angel,  
To have ever neared God's Heart at all.

Our Partner is notoriously difficult to follow,  
And even His best musicians are not always easy  
To hear.

So what if the music has stopped for a while.

So what  
If the price of admission to the Divine  
Is out of reach tonight.

So what, my dear,  
If you do not have the ante to gamble for Real Love.

The mind and the body are famous  
For holding the heart ransom,  
But Hafiz knows the Beloved's eternal habits.

Have patience,  
For He will not be able to resist your longing  
For long.

You have not danced so badly, my dear,  
Trying to kiss the Beautiful One.

You have actually waltzed with tremendous style,  
O my sweet,  
O my sweet, crushed angel.





## *Skinning Your Knees on God*

Little by little,  
You will turn into stars.

Even then, my dear,  
You will only be  
A crawling infant,  
Still skinning your knees on God.

Little by little,  
You will turn into  
The whole sweet, amorous Universe  
In heat  
On a wild spring night,

And become so free  
In a wonderful, secret  
And pure Love  
That flows  
From a conscious,  
One-pointed,  
Infinite need for Light.

Even then, my dear,  
The Beloved will have fulfilled  
Just a fraction,  
*Just a fraction!*  
Of a promise  
He wrote upon your heart.

When your soul begins  
To Ever bloom and laugh  
And spin in Eternal Ecstasy—

O little by little,  
You will turn into God.





## *It Cuts the Plow Reins*

What does Purity do?  
It cuts the plow reins.

It frees you from working and dining  
In the mud.

It frees you from living behind  
A big ox  
That is always breaking wind.

What can Purity do, my dear?

It can lift your heart  
On a rising, bucking Sun  
That makes the soul hunger  
To reach the roof of Creation.

It offers what the whole world wants—  
Real Knowledge and Power.

It offers what the wise crave—  
The priceless treasure of Freedom.

Pure Divine Love is no meek priest  
Or tight banker.  
It will smash all your windows  
And only then throw in the holy gifts.

It will allow you to befriend  
Life and light and sanity—

And not even mind waking  
To another day.



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It reveals the excitement of the Present  
And the beauty of Precision.  
It confers vitality and a sublime clarity

Until finally all the heart can do  
Is burst open  
With great love and laughter!

O Purity,  
O dear Truth and Friend within me,  
Why didn't you tell me sooner  
You could do all this —

Cut the reins of illusion,  
So we can all  
Just go wild  
Loving God  
And everyone all day!





## *A Wild, Holy Band*

Your breath is a sacred clock, my dear—  
Why not use it to keep time with God's Name?

And if your feet are ever mobile  
Upon this ancient drum, the earth,  
O do not let your precious movements  
Come to naught.

Let your steps dance silently  
To the rhythm of the Beloved's Name!

My fingers and my hands  
Never move through empty space,  
For there are  
Invisible golden lute strings all around,  
Sending Resplendent Chords  
Throughout the Universe.

I hear the voice  
Of every creature and plant,  
Every world and sun and galaxy—  
Singing the Beloved's Name!

I have awakened to find violin and cello,  
Flute, harp and trumpet,  
Cymbal, bell and drum—  
All within me!

From head to toe, every part of my body  
Is chanting and clapping!

Hafiz,  
The Beloved has made you  
Such a Luminous Man!

For with constant remembrance of God,  
One's whole body will become  
A Wonderful and Wild  
Holy Band!





### *Forever Dance*

I am happy even before I have a reason.

I am full of Light even before the sky  
Can greet the sun or the moon.

Dear companions,  
We have been in love with God  
For so very, very long.

What can Hafiz now do but Forever  
Dance!





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## *The Life and Work of Hafiz*

by Henry S. Mindlin, Consulting Editor

Despite the popularity of Hafiz in the East, reliable information about the details of his life is sketchy. Scholars do not even agree about his dates of birth and death. He was probably born about 1320 and died about 1388-89, roughly the same dates as the first great poet who wrote in English, Geoffrey Chaucer. His given name was Shams-ud-din Muhammad. He chose the name Hafiz ("memorizer") as a pen name when he began to write poetry; it is a title given to someone who knows the entire Quran by heart, as he apparently did. Hafiz was born in Shiraz, a beautiful city in southern Persia that escaped the ravages of the Mongol and Tartar invasions during this violent and chaotic period of history. He spent nearly all of his life in this cultured garden city.

### **Early Life**

*All is written within the Mind  
To help and instruct the dervish  
In dance and romance and prayer.*

Hafiz did not have an easy or comfortable life. He was the youngest of three sons of poor parents. His father was a coal merchant who died when Hafiz was in his teens. To help support the family, Hafiz worked as a baker's assistant by day and put himself through school at night, using part of his salary to pay his tuition. Over many years, he mastered the subjects of a "classical" medieval education: Quranic law and theology,

grammar, mathematics and astronomy. He also mastered calligraphy, which in the centuries before printing was a highly refined art form. Islamic calligraphy was originally developed as a sacred art to preserve and glorify the Quran, the message of God. Since representational art was forbidden by religious law, calligraphy reached a remarkable degree of subtlety and expressiveness. Hafiz was a skilled draftsman and occasionally worked as a professional copyist.

His early education naturally included the great Persian poets: Saadi of Shiraz, Farid-ud-din Attar, Jalal-ud-din Rumi and others. Poetry is a national art in Persia, somewhat like opera in Italy. Even in modern Iran, people at every social level know the great poets, argue passionately about their favorites and quote them constantly in everyday conversation. In medieval Persia, the art of poetry was taken seriously and valued highly. Local princes and provincial governors employed court poets to create epic verses celebrating their greatness. When the ruler was especially pleased by a composition, the poet was sometimes placed on a scale and rewarded with his weight in gold.

### Court Poet

*A poet is someone  
Who can pour Light into a Spoon.*

Hafiz had a natural poetic gift. Even as a child, he was able to improvise poems on any subject in any form and style. When he was in his early twenties, some of his love poems began to circulate in Shiraz, and he was soon invited to participate in poetry gatherings at court. He won the patronage of a succession of rulers and wealthy noblemen. One of his benefactors founded a religious college and offered Hafiz a position as a teacher. Thus, during his middle years, he served

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as a court poet and a college professor. He married and had at least one son.

Hafiz's livelihood depended solely on patronage. Everyone admired his literary brilliance, but his poetry boldly celebrated ideas that bordered on heresy, and he had enemies among the rigorously orthodox who "blacklisted" him whenever they came to power. Periodically, he would fall out of favor and lose his position, both at court and in the college. He could sometimes use his skills as a copyist to support his family until his fortunes improved. At least once, however, he was forced to leave Shiraz. For several years he lived as an exile, often in dire poverty. Finally a new, more tolerant regime allowed him to return home and resume his career. During the long, unsettled middle period of his life, first his son and later his wife passed away. Some scholars associate many of his deeply felt verses of grief, separation and loss with these events.

By the time he was sixty, Hafiz had become famous as a master poet. A circle of students and companions gathered around him, and he served them as a teacher and counselor until his quiet death at about the age of seventy. He was buried in one of his favorite spots, at the foot of a cypress tree he himself had planted in a rose garden near Shiraz. For five hundred years his tomb, surrounded by the rose garden, was a center of pilgrimage and refreshment for thousands. By the early twentieth century, however, the tomb had fallen into disrepair. Then in 1925, arrangements were made with the Persian government to have a new structure built over the grave and to have the gardens gradually restored. These arrangements were initiated and partially funded by a contemporary spiritual figure from India who loved Hafiz, Avatar Meher Baba. This modern world teacher frequently quoted couplets of Hafiz to illustrate his own discussions of spiritual principles. Meher Baba explained that the love poetry of Hafiz contained all the secrets of the spiritual path —for the true subject matter of spirituality is Love.

## Spiritual Student

*We have been in love with God  
For so very, very long.*

Hafiz was, in fact, a spiritual student. As a young man, he became a disciple of a Sufi teacher who guided him through a difficult spiritual apprenticeship that lasted most of his adult life. Later, Hafiz himself became a Sufi master. His *Divan* (collected poems) is a classic in the literature of Sufism, an ancient spiritual tradition whose special emphasis is intense, often ecstatic, one-pointed devotion to God.

In the West, Sufism is usually regarded as a form of Islamic mysticism. However, the Sufis themselves say their "way" has always existed, under many names, in many lands, associated with the mystical dimension of every spiritual system. In ancient Greece, for example, they were identified with the wisdom (*sophia*) schools of Pythagoras and Plato. At the time of Jesus, they were called Essenes or Gnostics. After Muhammad, they adopted many of the principles and formulations of Islam and became known in the Muslim world as "Sufis," a word given various meanings, including "wisdom," "purity" and "wool" (for the coarse woolen habits of wandering dervishes).

From about 800 to 1400 A.D., Sufi schools flourished under the guidance of master teachers such as Rumi and Ibn Arabi. As individual schools developed, their methods of teaching diversified according to the needs of each group. Some stressed formal meditation, others focused on selfless service to the world, and still others emphasized devotional practices: song, dance and spiritual poetry celebrating love for God. The Sufis cherish the poetry of Hafiz as a perfect expression of the human experience of divine love.

How Hafiz came to be a Sufi student is a famous and popular story told in many versions throughout the East:

It is said that when he was twenty-one and working as a baker's assistant, Hafiz delivered some bread to a mansion and happened to catch a fleeting glimpse of a beautiful girl on the terrace. That one glimpse captured his heart, and he fell madly in love with her, though she did not even notice him. She was from a wealthy noble family, and he was a poor baker's assistant. She was beautiful, he was short and physically unattractive—the situation was hopeless.

As months went by, Hafiz made up poems and love songs celebrating her beauty and his longing for her. People heard him singing his poems and began to repeat them; the poems were so touching that they became popular all over Shiraz.

Hafiz was oblivious of his new fame as a poet; he thought only of his beloved. Desperate to win her, he undertook an arduous spiritual discipline that required him to keep a vigil at the tomb of a certain saint all night long for forty nights. It was said that anyone who could accomplish this near-impossible austerity would be granted his heart's desire. Every day Hafiz went to work at the bakery. Every night he went to the saint's tomb and willed himself to stay awake for love of this girl. His love was so strong that he succeeded in completing this vigil.

At daybreak on the fortieth day, the archangel Gabriel appeared before Hafiz and told him to ask for whatever he wished. Hafiz had never seen such a glorious, radiant being as Gabriel. He found himself thinking, "If God's messenger is so beautiful, how much more beautiful must God be!" Gazing on the

unimaginable splendor of God's angel, Hafiz forgot all about the girl, his wish, everything. He said, "I want God!"

Gabriel then directed Hafiz to a spiritual teacher who lived in Shiraz. The angel told Hafiz to serve this teacher in every way and his wish would be fulfilled. Hafiz hurried to meet his teacher, and they began their work together that very day.

### Hafiz and His Teacher

*Our Partner is notoriously difficult to follow,  
And even His best musicians are not always easy  
To hear.*

The teacher's name was Muhammad Attar. "Attar" signifies a chemist or perfumer, and it is believed that Muhammad Attar owned a shop in Shiraz and lived a very ordinary public life. Only his small circle of students knew him as a spiritual teacher.

Hafiz visited Attar nearly every day for years. They sat together, sometimes dined together, sometimes talked, sometimes sang, sometimes went for quiet walks in the beautiful rose gardens of Shiraz. Attar opened Hafiz's vision to fresh, ever deeper perceptions of the beauty and harmony of life and a much broader understanding of all the processes of love. It was natural for Hafiz to express these insights in the language of poetry. Muhammad Attar was also a poet, and he encouraged Hafiz in this direction. For many years, Hafiz created a poem a day for his teacher. Attar told his students to collect and study these poems, for they illustrated many of the central principles of spiritual unfolding.

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However, the relationship between Hafiz and his teacher was not always an easy one. In many accounts, Muhammad Attar is presented as a stern and demanding figure who sometimes appeared to show no compassion at all for Hafiz. Modern spiritual figures, notably Avatar Meher Baba, have used the example of Hafiz and Attar to illustrate how challenging and difficult it can be to serve an authentic spiritual teacher. In his discourses on the role of the master, Meher Baba explains that, regardless of external appearances, a teacher must always aid internal processes of growth that support increasingly broader designs of love. Along the way, the student's limited ego is dissolved—or as Hafiz says, ground to dust. Meher Baba described this process as "hell on earth" for Hafiz. He said, "Hafiz, so to speak, broke his head at the feet of his master," day after day, year after year, for forty long years.

Some stories about Hafiz and his teacher support this view. Often Hafiz is portrayed as running to Attar in despair, pleading for enlightenment or spiritual liberation after decades of frustration. Each time, Attar would tell Hafiz to be patient and wait, and all would be revealed. According to one account:

One day, when Hafiz was well over sixty, he confronted his aged teacher and said, "Look at me! I'm old, my wife and son are long dead. What have I gained by being your obedient disciple for all these years?" Attar gently replied, "Be patient and one day you will know." Hafiz shouted, "I knew I would get that answer from you!" In a fever of spiritual desperation, he began another form of forty-day vigil. This time he drew a circle on the ground and sat within it for forty days and nights, without leaving it for food, drink or even to relieve himself. On the fortieth day, the angel again appeared to him and asked what he desired. Hafiz discovered that during the forty days

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all his desires had disappeared. He replied instantly that his only wish was to serve his teacher.

Just before dawn Hafiz came out of the circle and went to his teacher's house. Attar was waiting at the door. They embraced warmly, and Attar gave Hafiz a special cup of aged wine. As they drank together, the intoxicating joy of the wine opened his heart and dissolved every trace of separateness. With a great laugh of delight, Hafiz was forever drowned in love and united with God, his divine Beloved.

It is said that Hafiz unknowingly began his vigil *exactly* forty days before the end of his fortieth year of service to his teacher and that the "moment of union" was *exactly* forty years to the day from the moment they first met.

### Levels of Love

*All I know is Love,  
And I find my heart Infinite  
And Everywhere!*

Many of these vignettes about Hafiz have the charming symmetry and precision of symbolic teaching stories. The recurring number forty, for example, might not be meant literally. In spiritual literature, "forty" is often used to indicate a term of learning or change, such as the "forty days and forty nights" of Noah's Flood. Forty is also called "the number of perseverance," marking a period of growth through testing, trial and purification. After the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites endured "forty years of wandering" in the wilderness before they were ready to enter the Promised Land. Jesus, following the ancient practice of the prophets, went into the

desert for a great seclusion of forty days, which he described as a period of purification and preparation for the next stage of his work. The Buddha attained final enlightenment after forty days of continuous meditation. One can find many examples, East and West.

These tales of Hafiz share other common symbols. There is the “mystic circle,” which is an image of completion or perfection. And there is the glass of wine Attar gives Hafiz. A glass or cup is a vessel, which can often represent the human heart, or even the human being as a vessel of love. “Wine” stands for love in many spiritual traditions. Aged wine, such as Attar shares with Hafiz, can represent the purified (distilled) essence of knowing or love.

As teaching stories, these episodes can be seen to illustrate central stages of the Sufi “path of love” or inner unfolding:

Hafiz begins his spiritual journey as nearly everyone does—he is awakened to love. An ideal of human beauty and perfection seizes his heart. Desperate to win his ideal, he fully explores the realm of human love (*his poems and songs celebrate her beauty and his longing for her*).

Finally, he directs all the energies of his life to the pursuit of love (*a forty-day vigil*).

When his longing reaches its highest pitch (*dawn of the final day*), a new and higher dimension of love reveals itself (*Gabriel*). He is able to respond to the beauty of this higher understanding (“*I want God!*”), and his response ushers him into a new phase of learning and a new relationship of love (*with a spiritual teacher*).

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This new term of growth (*forty years*) is exponentially longer than the first one. Attar leads Hafiz through a review of increasingly broader and more encompassing levels of love (*a poem a day*). Hafiz becomes restless as his love for God grows stronger. Attar constantly counsels “patience” to remind Hafiz that every stage of love must be fully explored, honored and lived.

As the term nears its end, Hafiz reaches a new height of desperation and longing for his Beloved. He again seeks to devote all his energies to love (*another forty-day vigil*). This time he binds himself within a circle (*of perfection or completion*), literally circumscribing all his thoughts and actions to a single focus—God. He strives to perfect his love for God until nothing else exists for him.

When he has truly accomplished this (*dawn of the final day*), he finds that the force of love has consumed his limited personality and all its desires, even the desire for God. He has realized that one cannot “master” love, one can only serve as a vessel of love (*a glass of wine*).

Emerging from the circle, Hafiz is now able to approach and embrace every experience of life with the unlimited wisdom of love (*he and his teacher embrace*). He and Attar now share the same perfect knowing (*the aged wine of love's maturity*). The “glass of aged wine” now becomes a symbol for “the embodiment of perfect love”—Hafiz himself.

## Perfection

*I hear the voice  
Of every creature and plant,  
Every world and sun and galaxy—  
Singing the Beloved's Name!*

The idea that a human being can achieve “perfect love” or “perfect knowing” may seem extraordinary, yet it is a belief shared by most spiritual systems. It is called by many names—“union with the Father,” “*nirvikalpa samadhi*,” “the highest development of consciousness,” “God-realization,” “*Qutubiyat*” or simply “Perfection.” One who attains it can be called a Perfect Master, someone who embodies a perfect understanding of the beauty and harmony of the universe.

A Perfect Master experiences life as an infinite and continuous flow of divine love, swirling in, around and through all forms of life and all realms of creation. It is an experience of total unity with all life and all beings. A Perfect Master personifies perfect joy, perfect knowing and perfect love and expresses these qualities in every activity of life.

In the Western world, the most familiar example of such perfect love may be St. Francis of Assisi. In the East, there have been many—Rumi in Persia, Kabir and Ramakrishna in India, Milarepa in Tibet, Lao-tzu in China are all revered as Perfect Masters.<sup>1</sup>

The teacher of Hafiz, Muhammad Attar, was a Perfect Master, and so was Hafiz himself. The poetry of Hafiz can be read as a record of a human being’s journey to perfect joy, perfect knowing and perfect love.

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<sup>1</sup> World Teachers such as Jesus, Buddha, Krishna and Muhammad also exemplify perfection.

## Master Poet

*Write a thousand luminous secrets  
 Upon the wall of Existence  
 So that even a blind man will know  
 Where we are,  
 And join us in this Love!*

Hafiz developed his poetry under the guidance of his teacher. Muhammad Attar reviewed and discussed the poems in his teaching circle, and many of them were set to music. This was a common practice in Sufi schools of the time, including Rumi's order of "whirling dervishes" in Turkey. Poetry and song, easy to memorize and repeat, were used as teaching materials to encapsulate or summarize spiritual principles. With Attar's encouragement, Hafiz perfected this teaching method using a popular form of love song, the *ghazal*. He wrote hundreds of *ghazals*, finding ways to bring new depth and meaning to the lyrics without losing the accustomed association of a love song.

His poems expressed every nuance and stage of his growing understanding of love. He wrote of the game of love, the beauty of the Beloved, the sweet pain of longing, the agony of waiting, the ecstatic joy of union. He explored different forms and levels of love: his delight in nature's beauty, his romantic courtship of that ideal, unattainable girl, his sweet affection for his wife, his tender feelings for his child—and his terrible grief and loneliness when, later in his life, both his wife and his son passed away. He wrote of his relationship with his teacher and his adoration of God.

All who heard his poetry could easily associate it with their own most cherished experiences of love. The familiar rhythms of the love song, the *ghazal*, made the poems easy to

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learn. Before long, his poems were sung all over Persia by people from every walk of life—farmers, craftsmen, scholars, princes, even children.

Many who knew of Hafiz and enjoyed his poetry had no idea that he was a Sufi. Nor did many people know the spiritual status of his teacher. Like many Sufi masters of his time, Muhammad Attar met with his students in secret, and Hafiz did not reveal his own association with Attar until after his master's death. In the religious climate of medieval Persia, this secrecy was essential. From time to time, waves of what might be called fanatical fundamentalism swept through the country. To these fundamentalists, it was blasphemy to suggest that any human being could attain perfection or approach direct knowledge of divinity. The Sufi schools were frequently outlawed, and many of their adherents were tried and executed. Those who survived were forced to meet in secret and disguise their teachings in a symbolic language that would not offend the orthodox. This became the language of Sufi poetry. Images of wine and the Tavern came to represent love and the Sufi school; the nightingale and the Rose were the lover and the Beloved. Spiritual students were depicted as clowns, beggars, scoundrels, rogues, courtesans or intoxicated wayfarers.

This symbolic language developed gradually over hundreds of years. Hafiz brought it to perfection in his poetry. Even today, people argue about the "true" meaning of his verses—is he simply describing the joy of walking in the garden or speaking symbolically about God's delight in the material forms of His Creation? Or both? When he praises a wealthy patron or the charms of a young woman, is he really celebrating God, his true Patron and Beloved? Perhaps both. For Hafiz does not see God as separate from the world—wherever there is love, there is the Beloved. The Indian Sufi teacher Inayat Khan explained, "The mission of Hafiz was to

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express to a fanatical religious world that the presence of God is not to be found only in heaven, but also here on earth."

In Persian, Hafiz is sometimes called "The Tongue of the Invisible," for so many of his poems seem to be ecstatic and beautiful love songs from God to His beloved world. Hafiz shares his intoxication with the magic and beauty of divine life that pulsates everywhere around us and within us. He scorns hypocrisy and mediocrity and urges us to rise on the wings of love. He challenges us to confront and master the strongest forces of our own nature. He encourages us to celebrate even the most ordinary experiences of life as precious divine gifts. He invites us to "awake awhile" and listen to the delightful music of God's laughter.

*What is this precious love and laughter  
Budding in our hearts?  
It is the glorious sound  
Of a soul waking up!*



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## Select Bibliography

Daniel Ladinsky

Those interested in exploring more of the life and work of Hafiz will find much information and many different approaches to the poems in the following books, which have been helpful to me:

### The *Divan*

*The Divan-i-Hafiz*. Translated into English prose by Lieut.-Col. H. Wilberforce Clarke. 2 vols. 1891. Reprint, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1970.

This is the literal translation I have found most helpful in my own work. (I have a "deluxe" edition of the reprint, issued in Iran.) Clarke's 44-page preface summarizes the life of Hafiz and gives an outline of sources.

*Divan of Hafiz*. English version by Paul Smith. 2 vols. Melbourne: New Humanity Books, 1986.

The contemporary Australian poet Paul Smith has written a version of all 791 poems attributed to Hafiz. He worked for many years to duplicate or simulate as closely as possible in English the rhyme scheme and meter of every one of Hafiz's poems. The result is the second volume of this set. In the first volume, a separate 256-page book, Mr. Smith has assembled what may be the most comprehensive collection of information and legends about Hafiz, his life and times and his poetry. This first volume contains an enormous Hafiz bibliography and a fascinating study of the history of Hafiz scholarship and translation in the West, including some intriguing quotes about Hafiz and his poetry by Goethe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edward Fitzgerald (best known for his version of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam), the Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan and many others. Emerson said, "Hafiz defies you to show him or put him in a condition inopportune or ignoble. . . . He fears nothing. He sees too far; he sees throughout; such is the only man I wish to see or be."

## Selected Poems

Arberry, Arthur J., comp. *Fifty Poems of Hafiz*. 1953. Reprint, Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1993.

This paperback anthology presents poems by 15 translators. It may be the most accessible book of Hafiz's poetry currently available in America. It contains an excellent 34-page introduction and some 50 pages of scholarly notes. The poems are printed in both English and Persian.

Bell, Gertrude Lowthian, trans. *Teachings of Hafiz*. 1897. Reprint, with a preface by E. Denison Ross and introduction by Idries Shah, London: Octagon Press, 1979.

Gertrude Bell's 43 translations of Hafiz were considered some of the best of the nineteenth century. She supplements her rhymed versions with detailed notes about individual lines and phrases. This edition also includes 90 pages of informative essays by the Sufi author Idries Shah, the Oriental scholar E. Denison Ross, and a long translator's preface by Miss Bell.

Kennedy, Maud. *The Immortal Hafiz*. North Myrtle Beach, SC: Manifestation, 1987.

This delightful small volume is a free rendering that draws heavily from a translation of Hafiz by John Payne published privately in London in 1901. John Payne was a member of the Persia Society of London, as was John M. Watkins, whose translation is cited below. Mr. Payne was also a friend of H. Wilberforce Clarke and is believed to have collaborated on Clarke's translation mentioned above.

Nakosteen, Mehdi. *The Ghazaliyyat of Haafez of Shiraz*. Boulder, Colorado: Este Es Press, 1973.

Free translations from Persian to English of 124 poems. This 370-page hardbound volume by a distinguished Persian scholar, a professor at the University of Colorado, contains 37 pages of interesting introductory material and notes. The poems are printed in both English and Persian.

Watkins, John M. *Selections from the Rubaiyat and Odes of Hafiz, Together with an Account of Sufi Mysticism*. 1920. Reprint, London: Stuart and Watkins, 1970.

An informative 40-page preface discusses central themes in the poetry and includes a glossary of Sufi technical terms.

## The “Path of Love” and Inner Unfolding

In the past twenty years, dozens of books have been published in English about the “classical” Sufism of Hafiz’s time. However, the sources I have found most helpful in understanding the spirituality of Hafiz are the contemporary works of Avatar Meher Baba. His books give the clearest presentation of spiritual principles I have ever seen. And to underline his points, he quotes Hafiz (in his own direct translations) throughout his works. Of his many writings, I would recommend the following:

Meher Baba. *Discourses*. 7th ed. Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 1987.

This wonderful 433-page paperback volume is a collection of dozens of short essays on issues of spiritual life. Meher Baba discusses the spiritual path, stages of love and processes of internal development. He gives a detailed review of the work of a spiritual master and the complexities of the master-disciple relationship. He also addresses what might be called “practical mysticism” as it applies to everyday life.

Meher Baba. *God Speaks: The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose*. 2nd ed., revised and enlarged. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1973.

Meher Baba’s primary work on the structure and purpose of creation and the evolution, involution and perfection of consciousness. There are many charts and diagrams and a long Supplement that includes many quotes from Hafiz to illustrate different stages of the spiritual path. Since its perspective is so vast, it is not an easy book to start with, but it is rewarding to study and contemplate.





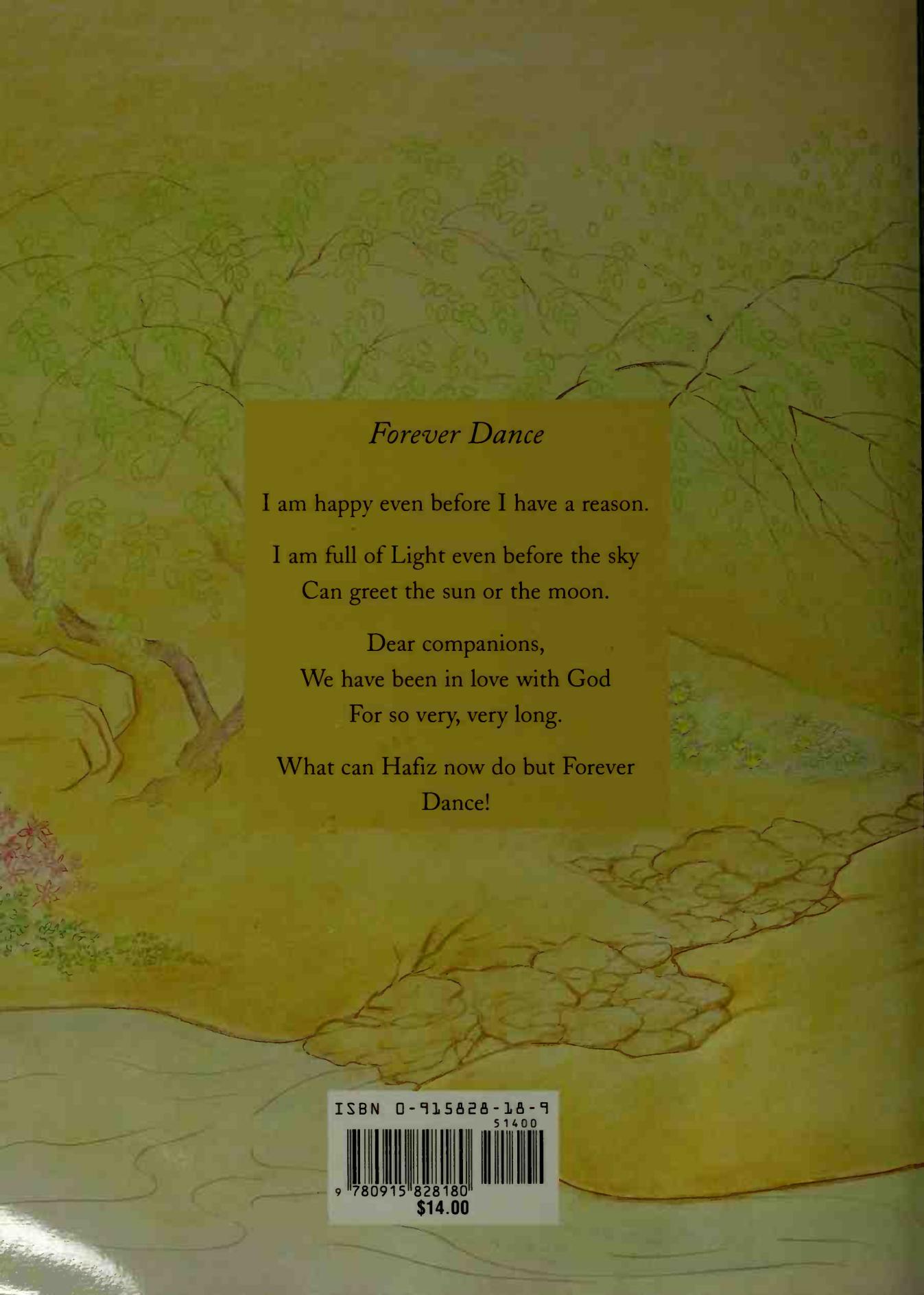
### *About the Author*

DANIEL LADINSKY was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1948. In his teens he began a spiritual quest that led him around the world. He was especially drawn to India, a land he visits regularly. For six years, Mr. Ladinsky made his home in a small spiritual community in western India, where he was given the rare privilege of living with the close companions (*mandali*) of Avatar Meher Baba, the preeminent spiritual figure of this age. While staying with the mandali, he began his work with Hafiz, Meher Baba's favorite poet. Mr. Ladinsky now resides in a small town on the South Carolina coast where he continues his work with Hafiz.









### *Forever Dance*

I am happy even before I have a reason.

I am full of Light even before the sky  
Can greet the sun or the moon.

Dear companions,  
We have been in love with God  
For so very, very long.

What can Hafiz now do but Forever  
Dance!

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