



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

*Islamic Mystical Poetry:
Sufi Verse from the early Mystics to Rumi*

ISLAMIC MYSTICAL POETRY

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ISLAMIC MYSTICAL POETRY

Sufi Verse from the Mystics to Rumi

Edited with translations and introduction by

MAHMOOD JAMAL

PENGUIN BOOKS

Dedicated to my brother
Ahmad Abdul Bari (Bari Mian)
without whose example and help
this book would not have been possible
and to my parents
for inculcating the spirit of poetry in me

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My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a
convent for Christian monks,

And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's [Kaaba](#) and the tables of the Torah and
the book of the Qur'an.

I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my
religion and my faith.

—Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi

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INTRODUCTION

Hafiz ba khwod na posheed en khirqai mai alood

Aye Shaykh-e-pakdaman mazoor dar mara!

Hafiz did not

Of his choice wear

This wine-soaked cloak;

O puritan Sheikh, beware!

He is helpless;

It was thus ordained!

Thus reverberate the words of the great Persian poet Hafiz Shirazi (c. 1320–89) in the lyrics of Murli, one of the greatest qawwals or Sufi singers of India.

My first introduction to Sufi poetry or Islamic mystical poetry was not through books but through the medium of qawwali, a kind of musical composition in which the verses, not the music, are paramount. At qawwali performances (or *Mehfil-e-Sama*), which regularly occur at both private homes and at the shrines of famous saints in South Asia, one can hear to this day the words of Hafiz and Sa'di Shirazi (1184–1291), Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–73) and Amir Khusrow Dehlavi (1253–1325), as well as the vernacular of Kabir (1398–1447), Sultan Bahu (c. 1628–91) and Baba Bulleh Shah (1680–1757), some of the most popular and revered Sufi poets of Islam. For it is in the poetry of the Muslim world that the soul and heart of Islamic civilization lie. While this is a book of Islamic mystical or Sufi poetry, and not about Islamic mysticism or Sufism (I will use these terms interchangeably), a better appreciation of the verses requires some understanding of Sufi ideas.

ORIGINS

Sufism has its origin in the early days of Islam, most notably the second century ah (eighth century ad), its centre located in Baghdad and Basra, which were then under the rule of the Abbasid Caliphate. What defined the early Sufis was their absorption with God,

other-worldliness and a life removed, and these concerns were reflected in their sayings and poetic output. These early Sufis were mystics and philosophers first and poets second. Their greatness, in other words, lies not in their poetry but in their lives and their utterances. Among the early mystics were Rabia Basri (d. 801), Junaid Baghdadi (830–910), Hasan Basri (642–728/737) and Shibli Baghdadi (d. 946), to name but a few, but the foremost among them was Mansur Hallaj (d. 922). He is considered the earliest martyr of Islam, executed for his famous utterance ‘*An al Haq*’ (‘I am the Truth’). Although preceded by Rabia Basri, Mansur Hallaj is perhaps the first major Sufi whose poetry is highly sophisticated and developed.

Many early Sufis spent their time seeking meanings and authorization in the Qur’an and the [Hadiths](#) to counter accusations of unbelief and deviation levelled against them by orthodox Muslims. Hence a substantial portion of early Sufi writing offers responses to unjustified criticism prompted by the utterances of the more passionate and fearless advocates of the path of divine love, where God and man merge into dangerous (i.e. unorthodox) *Shirk* (‘associating other beings with God’). It is through these writings that we get a fairly well-developed argument or justification for the Sufi Path, as the early Sufis develop the Sufi doctrine and explain its philosophy and manners. The further development of Sufi ideas through great masters like Abul Qasim Al-Qushayri (d. 1072) and Abu Hamid Al Ghazali (1058–1111) led to the infusion of Islamic culture with the mystical ideas of the Sufis, which permeated both philosophical and religious discourse. The impact of such ideas was profound on poetry, as it was the main artistic vehicle of Islamic civilization.

So what is this Sufi Path? We can describe it as the Path of Love where the human soul searches out God, and if the grace of God falls upon the searcher, then he or she finds *fana* (annihilation) in God and, ultimately, *baqa* or eternal existence in the consciousness of God. But these states are granted only to the saintly and God-graced few. For most, the Path is a path of loving God through His manifestations. This is the message that Sufism conveys to the common believer: love God, love God’s creation and praise Him and remember Him all the time. To put it simply, Sufism in its human essence replaces a fearsome and unforgiving God with a loving, loveable and merciful one.

Since God is unseen and formless, most humans need to find him through his creation and through human love. In loving another human being one discovers the all-consuming power of love, while the astonishing beauty of the Beloved reduces the lover to a state of

helpless abandon. At this point he or she becomes a slave willing to be sacrificed. But this love of the human is merely *Ishq-e-Majazi* (illusory love), and if the lover is pure of heart it should act as a bridge to *Ishq-e-Haqiqi* (true love), which is the love of God.

The mystical ideas that underpin Sufi poetry can be summarized as follows: God is Absolute Beauty and Absolute Good, and He precedes all creation and He existed alone. As it is in the nature of beauty to be admired, worshipped and revealed, so He created the phenomenal world so that His beauty could be revealed. It was born as a result of God's desire for the hidden to be known. But this world is not absolute as is God, and is only a reflection of Truth rather than Truth itself. It is, therefore, transitory. Moreover, as God is Absolute Beauty and Absolute Good, so this creation, however beautiful, is imperfect and represents what is Not-Good, as it is merely a reflection of the Good and not the Good itself.

In *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, E. J. W. Gibb (1857–1901) describes the double nature of the human Self that demands both transcendence and immanence from the seeker of divine love:

Man, like the phenomenal universe in which he finds himself, and of which he presents an epitome, is double-natured, partaking at once of Being and Not-being, of Good and Evil, of Reality and Unreality. But as that side of him which derives from Being, and which therefore alone has a real and eternal existence, is necessarily an emanation of Divinity, he is, so far, ultimately and essentially one with God. This Divine particle in man, this spark of Pure Being, is ever seeking, consciously or unconsciously, to be reunited to its source; but so long as the phenomenal state lasts, the presence of the element of Not-being holds it back.¹

The purpose of human life is therefore to eliminate as much as possible this state of not-being so that one may attain union with God and become absorbed into the Divine. While total annihilation of the not-being and complete union with God are to be realized only after death, a measure of this experience is possible even in this earthly existence. But how is one to transcend the element of not-being? The Sufis propose that it is to be achieved only by conquering Self, for although the Self appears real to us it is in fact an illusion that is the cause of our main sorrow, that is, our separation from the Divine. Gibb continues:

And how is Self to be conquered? By Love. By Love, and by Love alone, can the dark shadow of Not-being be done away; by Love, and by Love alone, can the soul of man win back to its Divine source and find its ultimate goal in reunion with the Truth. And the first lessons of this Love, which is the keynote of Sufism and of all the literature it has inspired, may be, nay, must be learned through a merely human passion. Than true love 'there is no subtler master under heaven'.²

But human love, which is the first stage of love, no matter how good and valuable, is not the end of the journey. The true pilgrim of love must recognize it as simply the bridge that he must walk across towards a higher goal. The nature of 'Typal' love offers some insight into the experience of this journey of love, which involves the complex states of being and not-being. Sufis distinguish 'Typal' love from divine love, describing it as a bridge to the real in which the pilgrim must beware of lingering too long, or else he may fail to reach the journey's end.

In the end, the true lover must cross this bridge of earthly love, leaving it behind. For the true lover relinquishing this love is not a loss, since what awaits him or her is far more beautiful and joyous. Once the journey ends

his eyes are opened, his heart is made clairvoyant through Divine Love; wherever he turn his gaze he sees the Face of God; God shines down on him from every star in the sky, God looks up at him from every flower in the field, God smiles on him in every fair face, God speaks to him in every sweet sound; all around him there is God, nothing but God. If he turn his eyes inward and look into his own heart, there he can read letter by letter the very heart of God. For he has now become one with God, knowing and feeling that there is naught beside God; and he can cry out with Mansur 'I am the Truth!' and exclaim with Bayezid of Bistam 'There is none other than God within my cloak!'³

This point is brilliantly illustrated in the excerpt from *Yusuf and Zulaikha* by Abdur-Rahman Jami (1414–92), which appears in this volume (p. 279).

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958), the renowned nationalist and scholar of Islam in South Asia, writing on the seventeenth-century mystic and poet Sarmad (*d.* 1661), has developed further the experience of this passage from worldly to divine love. For Azad, the lover must willingly seek the 'telling blow' of love, without which it is impossible to

sever the chains that bind us to this worldly life. In the following passage he eloquently describes the suffering that the lover must savour, since it eventually leads to self-reflection and eternal beauty.

The first condition of loving the Divine is to turn away from worldly concerns, but man is so chained and attached to earthly things that unless he receives a telling blow to the heart he cannot break this link. When a bee alights on honey, it will only depart if it is shooed away. The human heart does not turn away from the pleasures of the world unless it is hurt. Only Love can deliver this incisive blow.

Only the angel of Love it is who hides in his wings that powerful sword which can sever the ties that bind us to earthly pleasures and break the bonds of blood that restrict us. And when the heart is free of all restrictions and reflects upon itself, it finds no chains save the link of eternity that circles its feet. For this Love, wise Attar restlessly laments:

For the unbeliever Unbelief, for the believer Belief,

For Attar a particle of pain is enough.⁴

Those who have not experienced the peace-destroying blow of earthly love are the most unfortunate, since their hearts remain numb and impervious to the presence of Divine Beauty. If one has not yearned for an earthly Beloved, one's senses will not be honed sufficiently to be able to yearn for the Divine Beloved. Or as Azad observes:

Anyone who is so dead of heart who has never had the good fortune of destroying his peace and sanity in anticipation of the unveiling of earthly beauty is hardly likely to experience the presence of Divine Beauty through his earthly senses.⁵

Yearning and longing for the love of the Divine is seen as a gift that comes to the few who are fortunate enough to undergo the anguish and pain of longing for a heartless and indifferent Beloved. It is only then that the lover is capable of smashing free of the Self and becoming alive to the melody of creation:

That heartless one who has been unable to shower an indifferent and vain Beloved with all his stability, pride and joy, heart and mind. Such a man is not likely to

break the idol of self-worship and self-adoration that resides within him. One who has not been driven crazy by the song of a beautiful creature is unlikely to be ecstatic when he hears the music of creation. [...] Suffice it so say that he who is unfortunate enough never to lose his head and senses over a beauty's stark and unexpected gaze, will not be dizzy at the sight of the Divine.⁶

The ache of earthly love prepares the lover for the Divine, so that 'like the lamp which has already been lit' he or she is ready to burn instantly with the touch of a spark, unlike the unseasoned one that takes longer to light. This being the case, why should the seeker of the Real Beauty wait when it is possible to sample a foretaste of it in this world? Azad goes on to say:

If the seekers are searching for beauty, then why wait for the hidden to be revealed? They should be startled and dazed by the light emanating from the veil.⁷

We may read in the above words the underlying idea of *Elast*, a primordial covenant with the Divine to which the Qur'an refers, and which underpins all aspects of Sufism and the mystical approach to Islam, including Sufi poetry. According to this covenant, in pre-eternity before the world was created God assembled all the souls of humanity and asked, '*Elastu Bi Rabbikum?*' ('Do you not recognize your Lord?'), and the souls answered, 'Yes.' The mystics invoke this covenant to advance the idea that the soul is constantly yearning to be united with God. It is this wine, the wine of *Elast*, that Sufi poets allude to as the wine with which humankind is forever drunk. Those who gather in the Tavern of Truth, Maulana Azad goes on to say, are initially offered only a sip, but, once they are able to tolerate the bitterness of the wine, the Saqi (or Wine-giver) unveils himself. After that, there is no longer any need for goblet or wine: 'The glance of the wine-giver itself is intoxicating enough for the drinker to lose himself in.' We may also trace here another very important idea for the Sufi tradition of God as our friend. This idea, too, derives from the Qur'an (50:16), where it is said of the relationship between God and man: *Wa Nahno Aqrabo Elayhay min Hablil Wareed* ('But We are nearer to him than his jugular vein').⁸

Then there is the prophetic tradition I have already mentioned, which provides a philosophical argument for the creation of mankind and the need for mankind to love and worship God and His eternal beauty. According to one sacred Hadith, David is said to have asked God why He created man. God replied, 'I was a Hidden Treasure, therefore was I

fain to be known, and so I created creation in order that I should be known.’⁹ The Sufi quest for Divine Beauty emanates from this tradition and reflects a striving to accomplish this mission.

SUFI POETRY: STYLE AND CONTENT

Sufi poetry explores the ideas outlined above; in particular it celebrates human love as a bridge to a celebration of the Divine. Similarly, when a Sufi poem praises wine it is also praising the wine of *Ma’rifat* (gnostic knowledge). So, in this way, the apparently mundane and secular is, in fact, imbued with a spiritual interpretation – regardless of the poets’ intentions! It may be argued that many poems not written by Sufi poets also are imbued with the message of Sufism, consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, R. A. Nicholson (1868–1945), the eminent scholar of Islamic culture and civilization, has observed that almost all of the great poets of Persia have borrowed the ideas of Sufism and speak its language in their own way. Thus Hafiz Shirazi, writing in the fourteenth century, made the mystical terminology serve the function of a mask or a lady’s fan.

Apart from the recurring themes mentioned above, Sufi or Islamic mystical poetry is imbued with symbols and metaphors that derive from and develop many of the philosophical ideas of the early Sufis. These repeated images are the Lover, exemplified by Majnun or ‘the one possessed’; the Beloved, which ultimately refers to God, but could also be the earthly Beloved as a reflection of God’s beauty; the wine, which is the knowledge that is gained not by reason but by the heart or *Ma’rifat*; the Saqi or ‘wine-giver’, who brings this gnostic knowledge; the *Maikada* or ‘tavern’ where this wine is served, as opposed to the *Dair* or *Haram* (places of worship) where the *Zuhhad* (puritans or orthodox legalists) congregate. This magnificent poetry is also rich in simile and metaphor: the eyebrows of the Beloved are compared to the arches of a mosque, the hair of the Beloved to a snare for the lover, and so on. The idea is to celebrate love, which breaks the chains of earthly existence and disconnects us from worldly gain or loss; the lover is lost in this world and discovers his true essence through the ‘madness’ of love.

In his introduction to a collection of [ghazals](#) or love lyrics by Rumi entitled the *Divan-e-Shams-e Tabrizi*, Nicholson divides the early Persian poets into those who are Sufis by profession or conviction and those who are not. Many early mystics like Rabia Basri and Mansur Hallaj were Sufis or mystics first and poets second. For them poetry was more about a distilled form of expression of their devotion to God and their philosophical or religious concerns, and indeed their reputation as mystics far outstrips their

accomplishments as poets, which is as they would have wanted it. Rabia's verses, for instance, are more like devotional utterances than poems, although Mansur Hallaj was an inspired poet as well, as is obvious from his *Divan*.

Foremost among the great Sufis who were also great poets are Sanai Ghaznavi (*d.* 1131), Fariduddin Attar (1145–1221), Umar Ibn al-Farid (1181–1235), Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240), Jalaluddin Rumi and Mahmud Shabistari (*d.* 1320). They were also Sufi thinkers first and poets second, yet their continuing fame owes much to the beauty of their poetry. Even those poets who may not be classified as Sufis seek similarly to tantalize us and heighten our pleasure by the play of their wit, by suspending us between matter and spirit, and by alluding to love, wine and beauty in the warmest and most alluring colours. They do it with such subtlety of language, observes Nicholson, that 'often the same ode will entrance the sinner and evoke sublime raptures in the saint'. He goes on to say that 'The real basis of their poetry is a loftily inculcated ethical system, which recognizes in purity of heart, charity, self-renunciation, and bridling of the passions, the necessary conditions of eternal happiness.'¹⁰

Nicholson also draws our attention to another pervasive theme in Sufi (or Sufi-inspired) poetry: an incessant questioning of parochial and dogmatic interpretations of the Qur'an and of the Hadiths by the institutionalized authorities of Islam. While never assailing Islam itself, they persistently launch indirect attacks and

frequently the thought flashes out that all religions and revelations are only the rays of a single eternal Sun; that all Prophets have only delivered and proclaimed in different tongues the same principles of eternal goodness and eternal truth which flow from the divine Soul of the World. Among these, the genuine Sufi poets, Jalaluddin Rumi is without rival.¹¹

While talking of Persian Sufi poets one must not forget the revered Sufi poets of the Arabic language, foremost among them the saintly Umar Ibn al-Farid, whose *Qasida al-Khamriyya (The Wine Ode)* and *Nazm al-Suluk (Poem of the Sufi Way)* rank as the highest and most eloquent examples of mystical poetry; and, of course, the great Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi, whose influence went beyond the Arabic language to pervade and permeate all subsequent Sufi poetry in most Islamic languages, including Persian.

What Nicholson says about the Persian poets and Rumi is equally applicable to the great

poets of the Muslim world, be they Arabic, Turkish or South Asian. Their best works are informed by the basic ideas of Sufism and mysticism. Even modern secular poets are sometimes open to such an interpretation, because of the abiding essence of the ghazal. Since creativity and poetry have always been a part of Islamic tradition (and often at odds with religious orthodoxy), Muslim poets have often used the imagery of love and the questioning eye of the Sufis to express their profoundest ideas.

These mystical ideas first emerged in Arabic poetry, where the early poets skilfully adapted the existing metaphors of wine, love and beauty and infused them with mystical and Sufi meanings. From Arab poetry this influence spread to Persian and Turkish poetry, then to the South Asian subcontinent. Indeed, poets like Rumi and Baba Bulleh Shah, although they lived several centuries apart, share the same mystical preoccupations and use the same metaphors to express their ideas and emotions. Here are two examples:

Who am I?

What can I do my friends, if I do not know?

I am neither Christian nor Jew, nor Muslim nor Hindu.

What can I do? What can I do?

Not of the East, nor of the West,

Not of the land, nor of the sea,

Not of nature's essence, nor of circling heavens.

What could I be?

— Jalaluddin Rumi

Not a believer in the mosque am I,

Nor a disbeliever with his rites am I.

I am not the pure amongst the impure,

Neither Moses nor Pharaoh am I.

Bulleh, who knows who I am?

— Baba Bulleh Shah

Though the two main Islamic languages of Arabic and Persian provide us with the most accomplished exponents of Islamic mystical poetry, Sufi poetry in the South Asian languages of Punjabi, Sindhi and Urdu has come to the fore over the last few centuries. The coming of Islam to India in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought an influx of Muslim scholars and mystics in its wake. India was already a fertile ground for a kind of devotional poetry, while the Sufis found an attractive parallel of divine love in the Hindu idea of [bhakti](#).

It would be true to say that many great Sufis were also poets and many great poets were also Sufis, in orientation if not in practice. Almost all of the poets of the Islamic world, whatever language they expressed themselves in, have been in one way or another influenced by Sufism and have written verses imbued with Sufi ideas.

To summarize, Islamic mystical or Sufi poetry begins with the likes of Rabia Basri and Shibli Baghdadi, with the desire for piety and absorption in God reaching its culmination in the poems of Mansur Hallaj, the hero and martyr of Sufi poetry, whose introspection and absorption in God led him to the ultimate test of the gallows. We then enter the poetry of love for the Divine, and through this love the total bewilderment with the beauty and annihilation of the Self in love, reaching its peak in Fariduddin Attar, Jalaluddin Rumi, Ibn ‘Arabi and Umar Ibn al-Farid.

The river of this love flows and the poets get bolder in celebrating the inebriation and ecstasy of this love, as well as the wine that brings these forth and is symbolic of the way of the heart, and knowledge gained through insights provided by an all-pervasive love. This drunkenness in love and this heady wine then reaches its heights through the playful questioning of the very nature of existence, and the relationship of man and God becomes one of lover and Beloved – where the lover gets ever bolder in testing the affection and loyalty of the Beloved, and sometimes appears to transgress even the boundaries set by tradition and law. This, then, is the highest level of Sufi poetry, celebrating drunkenness in love, questioning, sceptical, but never letting go of the certainty of God’s mercy, His beauty, His blessing and loving kindness for His human devotees. As Hafiz puts it in ‘A Corner of the Tavern’:

The mosque or tavern,

wherever I went,

It's you I sought.

No other thought

was my intent.

FORM

In the main, the poetical forms represented in this anthology are also the most popular: the ghazal or love lyric, the masnavi or narrative poem, and the rubai or quatrain.

The ghazal has a strict metrical form and rhyme scheme, which can sometimes be a constraint. But the peculiarity for Western readers lies in the fact that each couplet can have its own individual and unique meaning and is not necessarily related to the previous or following couplet. In other words, there is no necessary continuity of events or ideas in the ghazal, although one can sense a continuity of mood or emotion. This peculiarity sometimes hinders the continuity of an idea, but it has a huge advantage in that, while discussing love (which all true poetry is surely about), the ghazal can also explore philosophical, social, religious and political ideas. This advantage has been exploited to maximum effect by both Sufi poets and modern poets of this genre.

Two other aspects must be noted for Western readers: the ghazal has no title (the titles in this anthology have been introduced for convenience) and usually the last verse includes the poet's name or nom de plume. In the following translations I have tried to retain the couplet form of the ghazal and the rhyme scheme, when I felt it was not forced, but in some cases I have abandoned both.

The masnavi is also written in rhyming couplets, but has a narrative structure and a continuity of meaning from one couplet to the next. It was used for storytelling and for larger philosophical speculation in verse. Here, it is exemplified by excerpts from Jalaluddin Rumi's *Masnavi* and Mahmud Shabistari's *Gulshan-e-Raz*. In fact, all the major Sufi poets – Sanai Ghaznavi, Fariduddin Attar, Abdur-Rahman Jami – expressed their ideas in the masnavi. However, it was mainly a Persian form. Arab poets like Ibn al-Farid wrote in a different style and form derived from Arabic prosody.

The rubai or quatrain needs little introduction to anyone familiar with *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859), translated by Edward FitzGerald (1809–83). In this anthology the quatrains of Abu Said Ibn Abil-Khair (967–1049) and Sarmad are perfect examples of the form and follow a strict rhyme scheme of aaba.

Naturally, these highly stylized poetic forms pose considerable difficulties for the translator, even before one takes into account the many layers of meaning in the words themselves, which have been refined over several centuries. As much as possible I have tried to interpret these poems in a modern idiom, and to retain the mood and rhythm of the originals, so that the reader gets a sense of the music of the poetry.

In the translations that follow I have kept textual references to a minimum, so that the poems stand alone without being weighed down by copious notes. There is one exception: Mohyuddin Ibn ‘Arabi added a lengthy commentary to his own poems, which is worth reading for the insight it gives us into his extremely symbolic technique.

The poems in this collection are arranged chronologically to give a sense of the development of Sufi poetry, and indeed Islamic poetry in general. I have chosen poets considered to be the most representative of their kind, but unfortunately limitations of space mean that I have left out vast areas of the Islamic world – such as Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and many South Asian languages, especially Urdu, which has a rich treasure of Sufi poems – where I have no doubt local poets have imbibed the wine of Sufi ideas.

Because of their symbolic language, many of the poems included here may be read on both a secular and a mystical level, depending on the state of consciousness of the reader. In a sense, all Sufi poetry is really love poetry, be it a lyrical ghazal or an epic like Rumi’s *Masnavi*. Indeed, the reader might be forgiven for seeing only a celebration of physical beauty and carnal desire in some of these poems, because many of them represent love poetry at its very best. The Sufi poet feels justified in praising earthly beauty, because it reflects the Ultimate Beauty of the Creator. Certainly, it would be fair to say that the best poets use this ambiguity to enhance the charm of their verses and imbue them with a prismatic quality.

What the great Sufi philosopher Abu Hafs Suhrawardi (1145–1234) said of music might also be an apt way to think about poetry, especially Sufi poetry:

Music does not give rise, in the heart, to anything which is not already there: so he whose inner self is attached to anything else than God is stirred by music to sensual desire, but the one who is inwardly attached to the love of God is moved, by hearing music, to do His will. What is false is veiled by the veil of Self and what is true by the veil of the heart, and the veil of the Self is a dark earthly veil, and the veil of the heart is a radiant heavenly veil.

The common folk listen to music according to nature, and the novices listen with desire and awe, while the listening of the saints brings them a vision of the Divine gifts and graces, and these are the gnostics to whom listening means contemplation. But finally, there is the listening of the spiritually perfect to whom, through music, God reveals Himself unveiled.¹²

It is in the poetry of the Islamic world, rather than its monumental architecture, that one can find the heart and soul of the Muslims. Islamic mystical poetry may be thought of as a river in which one must drown before one can find one's Self. This river springs from the early centuries of Islam in Basra and Baghdad, collecting water from many streams, reflecting manifold linguistic and regional currents and eventually emerging as the great channel that we find flowing today through all Muslim lands in one form or another.

If the great architecture of the Islamic world is the body of Islamic civilization, then the poetry of the Islamic world is its soul, and in reaching into the soul one finds the very depth of universal Being. The river of this poetic imagination has been blocked by artificial dams erected by puritan orthodoxy or it has been abandoned to stagnate by the modern world. It is time that these barriers to the spirit of a great civilization were removed and the river allowed to flow again and inundate our minds with beauty and love, and provide us with the spiritual resources to dwell in a troubled world.

NOTES

1. E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, (London: Luzac & Co., 1900–1909) vol. i, pp. 16–20.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. Bayezid of Bistam (d. 874) was an early Sufi who declared that God was in him.
4. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *Sarmad the Martyr* (1910), translated by Mahmood Jamal (www.ideaindia.com, 2006).
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *The Qur'an*, translated by Tarif Khalidi (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 426.
9. Cited in E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, vol. i, p. 17.
10. *Selected Poems from the Dīwāni Shamsi Tabrīz*, translated by R. A. Nicholson (Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2004), p. xxvi.
11. Ibid., pp. xxvi–xxvii.

12. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 182.

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PRAISE BE TO GOD

It's best that man
To God proclaims
His errors and shortcomings,
For no man has the capacity
To count His countless blessings.

—Sa'di Shirazi

Praise of the Prophet (PBUH)

The dark night of your hair
Is the day of salvation.
The raging fire of your love
Is the cooling stream of life!

— Nizami Ganjavi

Praise of the Saint Moinuddin Chisti

O Khawaja Moinuddin Chisti,
Sultan of Hindustan, Friend of the Poor.
O Knower of Secrets, hidden and revealed,
Sultan of Hindustan, Friend of the Poor.

— Daag Dehlavi

RABIA BASRI

(d. AD 801; AH 185)

One of the first mystic poets whose work has come down to us is Rabiya al-Adawiyyah of Basra. Many of the poems attributed to her have not been authenticated, but she is highly regarded as a foremost mystic. Born into a poor family, she became a follower of the famous Sufi Hassan of Basra.

She was noted for her absolute asceticism and many legends are told about her life, often citing her devout nature and absorption in God. More interesting than her asceticism, however, is Rabiya's concept of divine love. She was the first to introduce the idea that God should be loved for His own sake and not out of fear, as the earlier Sufis had taught.

YOUR PRAYERS

Your prayers were Light

And your worship peaceful,

Your sleep an enemy of prayer.

Your life was a test, but you let

It go by without a thought.

It's ever-passing, slowly vanishes

Before you know it.

YOU HAVE INFUSED MY BEING

You have infused my being

Through and through,

As an intimate friend must

Always do.

So when I speak I speak of only You

And when silent, I yearn for You.

IF I WORSHIP YOU

O Lord, if I worship You

Because of fear of hell

Then burn me in hell.

If I worship You

Because I desire paradise

Then exclude me from paradise.

But if I worship You

For Yourself alone

Then deny me not

Your eternal beauty.

TWO LOVES I GIVE THEE

Two loves I give Thee: love that yearns

And love because Thy due is love.

My yearning my remembrance turns to

Thee, nor lets it from Thee rove.

Thou hast Thy due whene'er it please Thee

To lift the veils for me to see Thee. Praise is

Not mine in this, nor yet in that, but Thine in this and that.

Martin Lings

MY REST IS IN MY SOLITUDE

Brethren, my rest is in my solitude,
And my Beloved is ever in my presence.
Nothing for me will do but love of Him;
By love of Him I am tested in this world.
Whereso I be I contemplate His beauty;
He is my prayer-niche; He mine orient is.
Died I of love and found not His acceptance,
Of mankind I most wretched, woe were me!
Heart's mediciner, Thou All of longing, grant
Union with Thee; 'twill cure me to the depth.
O Thou, ever my joy, my life, from Thee
Is mine existence and mine ecstasy.
From all creation I have turned away
For union with Thee mine utmost end.

Martin Lings

IF I DID NOT PRAY

I could not move against this wind if I did not pray.

And all that is said of me that is untrue

would make lame my gait if I

could not free myself from

the weight of other's

malice.

I could not move against all His light

if I did not

pray.

See how things become: what a change

can happen, when we find a way

to keep Him

close.

Daniel Ladinsky

IN MY SOUL

In

my soul

there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church

where I kneel.

Prayer should bring us to an altar where no walls or names exist.

Is there not a region of love where the sovereignty is

illuminated nothing,

where ecstasy gets poured into itself

and becomes

lost,

where the wing is fully alive

but has no mind or

body?

In

my soul

there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque,

a church

that dissolve, that

dissolve in

God.

MANSUR HALLAJ

(d. AD 922; AH 309)

Al-Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj was born around 858 in Shushtar (Khuzestan Province), Persia, to a cotton-carder (*Hallaj* is Arabic for ‘cotton-carder’). As a youth he memorized the Qur’an and would often retreat from worldly pursuits to join other mystics in study.

He is considered the foremost martyr of Islam, and has aroused debate and division about his status in Sufi and orthodox circles. He was not only a poet but is regarded as one of the greatest mystic-martyrs of Islam. Hallaj was put to death for his famous statement ‘*An al Haq*’ (‘I am the Truth’). He is regarded as a saint by many Muslims and non-Muslims.

As a young man Hallaj was the disciple of Suhail Tustari and then of Junayd Baghdadi, another famous Islamic mystic and teacher. He was also a close friend of Shibli Baghdadi. Apart from his *Divan*, his best-known written work is the *Kitab al Tawasin*.

I AM AT YOUR SERVICE

I am at Your service, O my secret, my whispered name.

I am Your servant, O meaning of my life, my purpose.

I call You and You call me;

Did I say I am You

Or did You speak through me?

O essence of my being, my search, my limit;

O my speech, my sign, my significance.

O reality of my existence, my perception, my sense,

O my creation, my design, my physical life.

O essence of my existence, essence of all;

You are dressed in my meaning.

You to whom my soul connected and was lost,

Once again the object of my desires.

Wandering from place to place I weep and sigh

And my enemies help me on my way.

When I come near You, fear drives me away

But Love deep in my soul makes me reckless.

WHAT CAN I DO, O LORD?

What can I do, O Lord, with this sickness?

Doctors shy away from me.

They say, 'Cure him with the illness.'

Can you cure someone with the disease itself?

Love, my Lord, has exhausted me;

How can I complain to my Lord of this?

My eyes fell on Him, my heart knew the Truth;

I can only speak of it in riddles and signs.

Woe is my soul, the cause of my pain,

I am the cause of my illness!

O YOU WHO ARE THE OBJECT

O You who are the object of my perception

And the hidden desire of my heart!

O complete Being, the Whole

Whom I love with all my parts.

I turn to You in longing and sorrow;

You for whom my heart is caught in the talons

Of a flying bird.

Immersed in pain, lost, amazed and dazed

I move from wilderness to wilderness.

Travelling, blinded by Your mystery,

Lightning fast and restlessly moving

Like the suddenness of a vision

That disappears as one wakes.

Carried away by the stream of awareness

For the pleasure of the Absolute.

STILLNESS

Stillness, then silence, then random speech,

Then knowledge, intoxication, annihilation;

Earth, then fire, then light.

Coldness, then shade, then sunlight.

Thorny road, then a path, then the wilderness.

River, then ocean, then the shore;

Contentment, desire, then Love.

Closeness, union, intimacy;

Closing, then opening, then obliteration,

Separation, togetherness, then longing;

Signs for those of real understanding

Who find this world of little value.

I LOST MYSELF IN FINDING YOU

I lost myself in finding You

Till you annihilated me in You.

O blessing of my life and being

And salvation in my death!

None but You are my sustainer;

It's You who are my fear and solace.

O Being in whose garden of meaning

All my qualities are flowering!

KILL ME, O MY TRUSTED FRIENDS

Kill me, O my trusted friends,

For in my death is my life.

To destroy all trace of my existence

Is the highest goal of my life.

And to dwell in my ego

Is an unrepented sin!

My Self has wrecked my life

And left me broken in desolation.

So kill me, friends, and burn

My wretched bones.

And when they walk by my remains

In desolate graveyards,

They will discover the secret of my Love

Among the living.

I GUIDE MY SIGHT WITH THE EYE OF KNOWLEDGE

I guide my sight with the eye of knowledge

Unadulterated by doubt.

My conscience is lit up with a light

Beyond doubt and meaning.

I ride on the waves of thought

Like an arrow undeterred;

My heart flies with the wings of Desire

Carried by the wind of my intent,

Towards Him of whom I dare not speak

But hide in riddles without uttering His name.

Till I cross all limits

Of the deserts which I roam.

I look from afar

But never cross the boundary;

Then tied like a slave

I bow to His Will.

His Love brands my heart with Love.

What a branding it is!

My Self is lost to me in this nearness

Which makes me forget who I am!

AMAZED AT THOU AND I

Amazed at Thou and I

O object of my desire!

Thou allowed me nearness to Thee,

Though I called Thee me.

I lost myself in finding Thee

Till Thou annihilated me in Thee.

O blessing of my life

And my solace after death,

None cares for me save Thou;

Thou art in my fear and peace.

O you garden of meaning

That circumscribes all my talents,

If I desire anything

I desire Thee!

WHICH PLACE ON EARTH?

Which place on earth is devoid of Your presence

That they search for You in the skies?

You see them looking at You

But they are blind and cannot see!

MY HEART

My heart had disparate desires

But the eye of the Beloved made them one.

One I envied, envied me.

I became Lord of Humans when You became my Lord.

Neither friend nor foe accused me because of You

Except for when they forgot my great suffering.

I gave up their world and humanity for them

By being absorbed in Your Love, my world, my religion.

WHEN THE STALLION OF LONELINESS

When the stallion of loneliness rides over you

And the scream of despair swallows Hope,

Take the armour of humility in your left hand

And sword of tears in your right hand

And be wary of your ego

And careful of the hidden revenge

And when you have to migrate in darkness

Take shelter under the torch of purity.

Tell the Beloved: You see my broken state,

Forgive me before our destined meeting.

O my Love, be not separate from me,

Do not abandon me before fruition.

I WITNESSED MY MAKER

I witnessed my Maker with my heart's eye.

I asked, 'Who are You?' He answered, 'You!'

For You one cannot ask, Where?

Because where is Where for You?

You do not pass through the imagination

Or else we'll know where You are.

You are He who is everywhere

Yet You are nowhere. Where are You?

In my annihilation is my annihilation's annihilation

And You are found in my annihilation.

YOU DWELL IN MY HEART

You dwell in my heart and all Your mystery.

It welcomes You, whom I find in it.

In it there is no one else, no secret that I know.

Look carefully: is there anyone else?

The night of separation, whether long or short,

In it, my friend, only the longing for You.

If You desire my death I am ready.

O my Destroyer, that is my wish!

HIDDEN LOVE IS ALWAYS IN DANGER

Hidden love is always in danger.

Greatest peace comes from approaching what one fears!

Hidden love which is spoken of

Is like the useless fire hidden in stone.

When friends and rain clouds gather

The storyteller defames me!

YOU WENT AWAY BUT REMAINED IN ME

You went away but remained in me

And thus became my peace and happiness.

In separation, separation left me

And I witnessed the Unknown.

You were the hidden secret of my longing,

Hidden deep within my conscience, deeper than a dream.

You were my true friend in the day

And in darkness my companion.

O SUN, O MOON, O DAY

O Sun, O Moon, O Day,

You are my heaven and hell.

To give up sin for You is sinful.

He who turns away from You is empty.

For You they give up all pleading

But what about he who has no excuse?

*Four Letters*¹

Four letters that make my heart restless

And my desire and thought in grief.

Alif – that drives men's actions.

L am – that leads towards guilt.

Then *Lam* – that increases my meaning.

Then *Ha* – that instigates me to Love and understand.

I SWEAR BY ALLAH

I swear by Allah that the Sun never rose nor set

Except that each breath of mine was infused with Your Love.

I never spoke to friends alone

And in every gathering You were the subject of my speech.

In happiness and sorrow I did not think of anything

But that which You had whispered to me.

Nor did I hope to drink in thirst

Until I saw Your reflection in the cup.

If it were in my nature

I would come to You on bended knees.

IF YOU WANT TO SING

O brave of the tribe, if you want to sing

Then sing of the sorrow of your heart.

They who laugh at me have no worth in my eyes

They are lost on earth and I roam the skies.

You have your way and I have mine.

I SWIM IN THE SEA OF LOVE

I swim in the sea of Love,

Tossed up and down by waves.

They lift me up at times,

At others in them I drown.

Till this Love brought me to

Where there was no shore in sight...

TRUTH

Made me whole, that being through Truth;

No other way for the searcher to reach his goal.

I am the truth and truth is true with Truth;

Once united with Him, no separation is possible.

The bright star shone forth

Like the waves of glimmering light!

ABU SAID IBN ABIL-KHAIR

(AD 967–1049; AH 356–440)

Like Omar Khayyam, Abu Said Ibn Abil-Khair is known as a writer of quatrains. He was born at Mahna in the district of Khawaran in Iran. He has been described ‘as the first master of theosophical verse, the first to popularize the quatrain as a vehicle of religious, mystic, and philosophic thought, and to make it, [in the words of the Orientalist Dr Ethé,] “the focus of all mystic-pantheistic irradiations”, and the first “to give the presentations and forms of the Sufi doctrine those fantastic and gorgeous hues which thenceforth remained typical of this kind of poetry”’.¹

He is referred to as a Sufi sheikh or master and is treated as a saint rather than a poet, his verse being overshadowed by the work of great Persian poets like Attar and Rumi. Abu Said Ibn Abil-Khair was the first to codify and record the rules for Sufi novices in the *khanqah*. Early classical Persian Sufi sources employ five different terms (*khanqah*, *ribat*, *sumaa*, *tekke* and *zawiyah*) practically interchangeably to denote the meeting house of the first Sufi fraternities.

QUATRAINS

To gladden one poor heart of man is more,
Be sure, than fanes¹ a thousand to restore;
And one free man by kindness to enslave
Is better than to free of slaves a score.

*

O Thou whose visage makes our world so fair,
Whose union, night and day, is all man's prayer,
Art kinder unto others? Woe is me!
But woe to them if they my anguish share!

*

In search of martyrdom the [Ghazis](#) go
To fight Faith's battles: do they then not know
That martyred lovers higher rank, as slain
By hand of Friend, and not by hand of Foe?

*

Let no one of Thy boundless Grace despair;
Thine own elect shall ever upward fare:
The mote, if once illumined by Thy Sun,
The brightness of a thousand suns shall share.

*

Till Mosque and College fall 'neath Ruin's ban
And Doubt and Faith be interchanged in man,
How can the Order of the [Qalandars](#)
Prevail, and raise up one true Mussulman?

*

Sir, blame me not if wine I drink or spend
My life in striving wine and love to blend;
When sober, I with rivals sit; but when
Beside myself, I am beside the Friend.

*

Said I, 'To whom belongs Thy Beauty?' He
Replied, 'Since I alone exist, to Me;
Lover, Beloved and Love am I in one,
Beauty and Mirror, and the Eyes which see!'

*

O God, I crave Thy Grace for hapless me!
For hapless me enough Thy Clemency!
Each some protector, some defender claims;
But I, poor friendless I, have none but Thee!

*

The gnostic, who hath known the Mystery,

Is one with God, and from his Selfhood free:

Affirm God's being and deny thine own:

This is the meaning of 'No god but He.'

*

Last night I passed in converse with the Friend,

Who strove to break the vows which I would mend.

The long night passed: the Tale was scarce begun.

Blame not the night, the Tale hath ne'er an end!

*

Since first I was, ne'er far from Thee I've been;

My lucky star hath served me well, I ween;

Extinguished in Thine Essence, if extinct,

And if existent, by Thy Light I'm seen.

Dr Ethé

SHEIKH ABDULLAH ANSARI OF HERAT

(*AD 1006–88; AH 395–480*)

Abu Ismaïl Abdullah ibn Abi-Mansour Muhammad was born and died in the ancient city of Herat (then in Greater Khorasan, but now in western Afghanistan), hence he is known as Pious of Herat. He is also known as *Shaykhul Mashayekh* or the Sheikh of Sheikhs. Considered the foremost Sufi poet of Afghanistan, he is also referred to as the Sheikh of Herat.

He wrote several books on Islamic mysticism and philosophy, the most famous of which, *Munajat Namah (Dialogues with God)*, is a masterpiece of Persian literature. After his death, his disciples compiled his teachings in *Kashful Asrar*, the best Sufi *Tafsir* (interpretation) of the Qur'an. His shrine in Herat, built during the Timurid Dynasty (1370–1526), is a popular site of pilgrimage.

O Generous Lord

The giver of blessed gifts,

O Wise One

Who hides our faults,

O Eternal One

Beyond our comprehension,

O One who is unique

In quality and essence,

O Powerful One

Worthy of worship,

O You, the All-knowing,

O Being without fault,

Alone

The essence that heals

And seer of our being,

Glory be to You,

You adorn the kingdom of heaven.

Not dependent on Place

Nor desirous of Time

There is none like You

Nor are You like any.

You are within our soul,

The soul is alive because of You!

Healing comes to the sick because of You,

Your remembrance brings a Friend for the Lover.

Everywhere a thousand Moses seek:

‘O Lord, show Thyself to me!’

A thousand lovers in search

Come to Your path bewildered, hopeful,

Breasts filled with burning from Your separation,

Eyes weeping with the pain of loving You.

Your lovers proclaiming, ‘My poverty is my pride’

Come to the path of love with ‘Allah’ on their lips.

*Pir-e-Ansar*¹ has drunk the dregs of Your Love

And wanders like *Majnun* across the world.

WHEN I COULD, I DID NOT

O Lord

When I could

I did not know;

And when I knew

I could not.

From my existence

I did not profit make;

All I said

All I did

Came to nothing.

What use not knowing, not doing?

For I neither knew nor did.

I HAVE NO KEY

My Lord, I have no key to open doors

Nor the power for forgiveness;

O Peerless One, our Creator,

What harm if You hear the cry

Of this afflicted man?

Without Your will

Creation would not be.

Without Your guidance

We would be powerless.

If You overlook what I have done

Or where I have failed,

I would gain everything;

And You lose nothing!

I COME AS A SLAVE

O Lord

I come to You as a slave;

On my lips, repentance.

On my tongue

The appeal for forgiveness.

If You wish, You bless me.

If not, I am forlorn.

For in Your presence

I am full of shame.

You are the Lord

All-powerful!

O LORD GIVE ME WISDOM

O Lord

Give me wisdom

So I should not lose

My way.

Give me sight

So I do not fall.

Help me in my work

And overlook my misdeeds!

WE HAVE NO EXCUSE

O God, if You ask,

We have no excuse.

If You measure us

We are empty.

If You burn us,

We are powerless.

We are beggars

Wanting blessings;

We are needy,

Destitute.

DESPERATE LOVERS

O Lord

We appear like

Desperate lovers,

And in our hearts

We are sleep-soiled;

Our breasts full of fire

Our eyes full of water;

Sometimes we burn

In the fire of our hearts;

Sometimes we are drowned in tears.

IF I ERR

Lord, if I err

I am a Muslim still;

Though a sinner,

I am repentant.

If You punish me

I bow to Your will.

If You bless me,

I am entitled to it!

THE LIMIT OF SPEECH

O Lord

To thank Thee

Is beyond the limit of any speech.

There is no limit to Thine

Ocean of Blessing!

Lead us, O Lord,

On the best of paths!

AHMAD JAM

(*AD 1048–1141; AH 439–535*)

The Sufi writer and poet Ahmad Jam was born in Namagh, a village in Kashmar, Iran. He is better known as Sheikh Ahmad-e Jami or Shaykh-e Jam or simply Ahmad-e Jam. His *Mazar* or tomb is located in Torbat-e Jam, Afghanistan.

Ahmad Jam is revered as a saint. His books on theology include *Meftah al Najat* (*The Key of Redemption*), *Konuz al Hekma* (*The Treasure of Wisdom*) and *Seraj al Saerin* (*The Lamp of Pilgrims*).

YOUR BEAUTY

Each who has seen Your beauty fine

Utters honestly, 'I have seen the Divine.'

Everywhere Your lovers wait for grace,

Remove Your veil, reveal Your face!

I am in the ocean and an ocean is in me;

This is the experience of one who can see.

He that leaps into the river of Unity,

He speaks of union with his Beloved's beauty.

WHEREVER I LOOK

Whatever I see, I see the Beloved's beauty;

Wherever I look I see His creation.

Wherever I look, I see Goodness;

Whatever is beautiful is the Beloved's beauty.

Every form that is beautiful in the world

Is only a sign to the Beloved's beauty.

How can you reach *Ahmad's* madness, O wise?

His Beloved's in the same state, and that is right.

DRUNK WITH LOVE

Drunk with Love day and night,

Evermore, the intoxicant heals.

Though pure wine was not my lot,

I drink the dregs each day and night.

He who sees the Beloved's face

Is sure to see it day and night.

The fire of love is lit in me;

I am the flame and the light,

Each day and night.

So I can beg at my Beloved's door,

I search the world each day and night.

TRUE DESTINATION

The destination of Love is something else;

The sign of the wise man is something else.

In the street where Love is bartered,

Under the gallows, waits the lover.

Those slain by the sword of acceptance

Are given a new life at every moment.

OF THY MERCY I AM SURE

Though I am a sinner impure,

Of Thy mercy I am sure.

I am maligned and taunted in the street

And covered with the dust of sin;

Broken-hearted and discarded

And a thorn in the eye of humanity.

I am one lost in the way of Love

And am one whose deeds are poor.

Cast Thy healing glance on me,

For Thy grace I yearn,

And of Thy mercy I am sure.

SANAI GHAZNAVI

(d. AD 1131; AH 525)

No reliable information exists of the date of birth of Hakim Abul-Majd Majdud ibn Adam Sanai Ghaznavi, but he lived in the Afghan city of Ghazna. He is the first of the great Sufi teachers and [masnavi](#) writers of the Islamic world, an equal of Fariduddin Attar and Jalaluddin Rumi, who acknowledged his debt in the following verse:

Attar was the spirit, and Sanai its two eyes;

We come after Sanai and Attar.

Sanai wrote seven masnavis and a divan, but his best-known poem is *Hadiqat-ul Haqiqah* (*The Walled Garden of Truth*), a classic Sufi text which contains some 11,000 verses. Sanai's influence on Persian literature has been immense. He was probably the first poet to use such verse forms as the [qasidah](#), the ghazal and the masnavi to explore Sufi ideas. His divan contains some 30,000 verses and is deserving of more critical attention than it has so far received.

IN THE NAME OF GOD THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL

O nourisher of the soul and adorer of the body,

Who blesses the unwise with wisdom;

Creator and provider of the earth and the world,

Protector and helper of the dweller and the home.

Everything is created by You, the dweller and the dwelling;

Everything exists because of You, the world and the earth.

Fire, air, earth and all that's on it

Follow Your command and are in Your domain,

From the heavens to the earth under Your control.

Reason and soul are all at Your mercy;

From every tongue Your praise ensues;

Your great names are proof of Your

Bounty and mercy and benevolence;

Each one of them is greater than heaven and earth and angel;

They are a thousand and one, yet ninety-nine.

Each name is related to the need of man,

Yet the uninitiated cannot see them.

O Lord with Your blessing and grace

Let this searcher see Your name.

Belief and unbelief in your path exclaim:

There is only one and none else that joins Him!

TRUE KNOWLEDGE

None can know Him of himself;

His nature can only be known by Him.

Reason ran after Him, but did not make it;

Weakness hastened on the path and found Him.

It was His mercy that said, 'Know me,'

Or else no reason or intellect could know Him.

How can our mere senses His truth perceive?

How can a nut rest on a sliding dome?

Reason can take you to His door

But only His grace can take you beyond.

By reason alone one cannot get there;

Like others before you, do not commit that folly.

His grace is our guide on this path;

His works are guide and witness to Him.

O you who are incompetent to know yourself

How can you ever know God?

Since you know not this first step

How will you know Him as He is?

GIVE ME WINE

Give me wine, O [Saqi](#), to dispel the pain of Love,

Make alive in the drinkers the spirit of Parvaiz!¹

Instill in this wine the fragrance of flowers.

Put in my hand the pearl-shedding cloud!

In cup after cup reflected your dark hair

Unravelling like those tresses, my vows of piety!

Do not play this music that can make you drunk,

Play this music only when the time is right, arise!

IN THE GRIP OF LOVE

Since my heart was ensnared by Love

My heart has become the wine in Love's cup.

It makes us drunk and destitute in the world.

O the cup, that painful cup of Love!

For fear of the sickness of this Love

On my tongue I never take the name of Love.

My life, my soul, my belief, my heart it wants;

Love's that bad, and its message to the soul is Love.

I gave my life, my heart, my belief to it

But yet no answer did I get from Love!

LOVE'S COMMAND

So long as this world exists, I do not want the pain of Love,

But I love Love and cannot break the vows of Love!

So long as the story of Love and lovers adorns this world

My name shall be written boldly in the book of Love.

The name of 'drunkard' from the puritans I've got,

Still I love and am obedient to the command of Love!

Their heart is caught in the snare of the Beloved's curls,

Those who ride with beauties in the field of Love!

I will play in this field of Love till eternity.

I have trapped my heart in the curls of Love!

In this world, my Love is the reason for goodness;

Since He is the reason for goodness,

I became the goodness of Love!

INVOCATION

O Friend, I want your sustenance,

O Beloved, I want to serve and obey.

It's my duty to obey and follow You.

My life, my soul, I bestow on You.

I heard the whisper of Your love once,

I yearn to hear that invocation once again!

If You were to ruin the mosque where I worship

My face would turn to the signs of Your ruins!

If You take away my heart with clever tricks

I will use tricks the same to get back to You.

THE NIGHT OF UNION

Each night I pray is a happy night for me,

Because the messenger of my Friend is near to me.

Everyone loses his light when night comes.

For me, my light comes when time for prayer comes.

Day of separation gone, the night of Union arrives;

O day, please end, let the night remain!

O Friend, so long as You abide, no sorrow can I have

So long as I live: You are my Lord and I a slave!

Each moment, Friend, when I come in front of You

Happiness is allowed and pain and sorrow forbidden!

NIZAMI GANJAVI

(AD 1140–1202; AH 535–95)

Born in Ganja in Azerbaijan, Nizami of Ganja or Ganjavi is the master of the romantic masnavi or epic. Though not strictly a Sufi poet like Fariduddin Attar and Jalaluddin Rumi, his influence on Sufi and Persian poetry has been enormous.

Nizami was undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of the Persian language, bringing a colloquial and realistic style to the Persian epic. He is renowned for his *Khamsa* (*Quintet*), five epic poems that served as models for numerous later poets: (1) *Makhzan al-Asrar* (*The Treasury of Secrets*), a series of discourses on ethical subjects composed c.1175; (2) *Khusraw and Shirin* (1180), the legend of the Sassanian monarch Khusraw II's love for the princess Shirin; (3) *Layla and Majnun* (1188), a Bedouin love story and the most popular romance in Muslim literature; (4) the two-part *Iskandar-nama* (*The Book of Alexander*), telling the legend of Alexander the Great and composed in 1191 and c.1200; and, finally, *Haft Paykar* or *The Seven Portraits* (1197), recounting the legendary history of the Sassanian monarch Bahram Gur.

I HAVE MADE A SHRINE

I have made a shrine out of the
Doorstep of the drinking tavern;
I have made my place of worship
In those beguiling eyes!
Goodbye to prayer and supplication;
Drunkenness and love of beauty I now own!
I have cast aside crown and throne
And put my head down at the Saqi's feet.
Heaven, mosque and Kaaba I have forgotten.
I have adorned my abode with the Saqi's face!
Nizami's heart was full of fear of the path;
I sought refuge in the blessing of
The Wine-giver, the All-wise.

MAJNUN

One night desperate Majnun prayed tearfully,

‘O Lord of mine who has abandoned me,

Why hast Thou “Majnun” called me?

Why hast Thou made a lover of [Leila](#) of me?

Thou hast made me a pillow of wild thorns,

Made me roam day and night without a home.

What dost Thou want from my imprisonment?

O Lord of mine, listen to my plea!’

The Lord replied, ‘O lost man,

With Leila’s love I have your heart filled;

Your Love of Leila is my will.

The Beauty of Leila that you see

Is just another reflection of me.’

FARIDUDDIN ATTAR

(AD 1145–1221; AH 539–617)

One of the greatest mystic poets of Islam, Abu Hamid bin Abu Bakr Ibrahim – better known by his pen names ‘Fariduddin’ and ‘Attar’ – was born and spent most of his long life at Nishapur in north-east Persia.

A pharmacist (*attar*) by profession, he is most famous in the West for his great mystical poem *Mantiq al-Tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*), an elaborate allegory about a search for a mythical bird (i.e., God). Attar’s other chief works are *Ilahinama* (*The Book of the Divine*), a parable of the quest for happiness of the six sons of a king; and *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, a collection of 97 biographies of Muslim mystic saints.

Attar lived in turbulent times, yet managed to survive and produce an enormous amount of work on a variety of subjects and themes. It is without doubt that his spirituality sustained and inspired all of his writings. He was assured of his own talent and confident enough to proclaim himself the ‘seal of poets’.

THE FIRE OF YOUR LOVE

The fire of Your Love is best inside the soul;

And the soul burning with Your Love is best of all.

One who has tasted a drop of Your wine today

Is happy drunk and dazed till judgement day.

When You came to be, I was hidden;

In the Beloved's presence, it was best not to be.

Give me pain, and cure me not of my Love,

'Cause Your pain is better than any balm.

Since none hope to meet You in this life,

This hopeless search for You is best of all.

Without You, I am witness to dry autumn.

In such an eye, the rain of tears is best of all.

Like a candle in separation from You,

It's best that *Attar* weeps all night.

THE PAIN OF LOVE

Whoever received an atom of this pain of Love,
For him both yesterday and tomorrow become today.

Everything we see is really One,
The months, the years are all just a day.

A thousand centuries have passed us by,
Yet this pain forever haunts us in the same way.

Whoever embarks on the search for a friend
Must burn in this fire and wait;
But each day he burns,
is his day to celebrate.

I see only an atom of this pain
whose sweet sting

Has reached the depth
of everything.

This pain is nothing else
Than the one that stokes the fire of Love;
This is the pain of that secret
That offers us a reason to live and love.

YOUR BEAUTY

Your beauty overshadows the world's allure;

It overcomes the desire

To exist, and the universe entire!

He who was so proud of his intellect and sanity,

Your single glance has brought to naught his vanity.

Reflection from Your Moon-like face reaches the Sun

And Lo! the Sun is brought low by it, O Beautiful One!

The magicians of Babel were beguiled,

Though they may be clever and wise,

When they saw the magic of Your eyes!

Yearning for You and torn apart,

Separation has broken *Attar's* heart!

MOSQUE OR TAVERN?

What is the way to the mosque and tavern?

'Cause both are forbidden to me, O friend!

I did not dwell in the mosque,

Because of drunkenness and censure,

Nor in the tavern,

As the wine-seller was immature.

Between mosque and tavern

There is a middle way;

Search for it, friends,

And find it; that's the place to pray...

Today the Kaaba is a temple for me,

The Saqi is my leader, the [Qazi](#) is with me.

Go away, for *Attar* knows full well

Who is the Lord and who is lost, astray!

O YOU WHO HAVE REVEALED

O You who have revealed

My hidden sorrow to the world,

Who am I that I received

Your fragrance in my soul?

I am stricken by sorrow.

Cast a glance this way,

For it's You who know

My secret, and with my heart You play!

O Love of mine,

In the hope of seeing You I roam.

In the valley of separation,

Eternally, I've made my home.

It's You who know the cure

Of my pain.

I've reached the limit, give me

The balm of Your love again.

Attar's soul is dishevelled

Like Your dark hair;

Bring him together, make him whole

And save his scattered weary soul.

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?

What madness has seized me because of You?

What is this tumult in my soul that You have instilled?

Because of You I am in a state of disarray.

It's not my norm to behave in this way.

I came pure and chaste from the two worlds,

Purified by the fire of Your Love divine.

That fire You have lit in my soul

Shall be my guide, eternal and sublime.

Where is the eye that can see You?

The Beloved is there, but the eyes are blind.

We are lost in our own veil,

While everywhere Your vision prevails.

So long as *Attar* is lost in Your sorrow

The people of the heart will always yearn for him!

ALL-PERVADING CONSCIOUSNESS

And as His Essence all the world pervades
Naught in Creation is, save this alone.
Upon the waters has He fixed His Throne,
This earth suspended in the starry space,
Yet what are seas and what is air? For all
Is God, and but a talisman are heaven and earth
To veil Divinity. For heaven and earth,
Did He not permeate them, were but names;
Know then, that both this visible world and that
Which unseen is, alike are God Himself,
Naught is, save God: and all that is, is God.
And yet, alas! by how few is He seen,
Blind are men's eyes, though all resplendent shines
The world by Deity's own light illumined,
O Thou, whom man perceiveth not, although
To him Thou deignest to make known Thyself;
Thou all Creation art, all we behold, but Thou,
The soul within the body lies concealed,
And Thou dost hide Thyself within the soul,
O soul in soul! Myst'ry in myst'ry hid!

Before all wert Thou, and are more than all!

Lucy M. J. Garnett

DRUNKEN REASON

Drunken reason is a precious gift from Your love;

My heart, a slave of those intoxicating eyes.

Wherever we find on earth goodness and quality

It's a garment that suits one with Your beauty.

There is no beauty greater than Thine.

The Sun and Moon adorned because of Thee.

The Sun that lights up the two worlds

Gets its beauty and light from Thee.

Wherever we see beauty, loveliness divine,

It's only a reflection of Thine.

Both the worlds, this and all that exists,

Are thirsting to drink from this ocean pure.

Because nothing exists in this world save Thee

And none in this world can compare to Thee,

Whoever has the eye to see

Is in truth blinded by Thee.

Farid is in this state of madness today;

He's considered wise, because he's mad for Thee.

SINCE I RECEIVED YOUR GIFT

Since I received Your gift of Love,

My task has become difficult, my Love.

Water pours out of our eyes;

There is a fire in our hearts, my Love.

Since eternity, before creation,

My soul is lost in Your fascination.

Not just the soul is entranced by You,

The heart, too, stands in line to wait on You.

Followers of the path are certain of Your Love,

And their destination is Your abode, my Love.

I arrive empty and seek Your grace,

Reason here has no place in this place!

Let no one ask why and what this is;

This is a mystery that no answer gives.

Attar's heart is lost in You!

He is like a wounded bird for You!

I SHALL BE DRUNK TONIGHT

I shall be drunk tonight and

Dance with a cup of wine in my hand!

I shall wander through the streets

Of drunkenness and lose all in a game of chance.

How long shall I be a hypocrite?

How long will I worship my Self?

I want to tear this veil of puritan pride;

I want to break this false vow of abstinence;

Time has come to have some courage

And prepare to be a slave of Love.

Give me such intoxicating wine, O Saqi;

Hurry or the sorrow will pervade my soul!

Pass the wine, yes, pass the wine!

So that we can bring down the skies under our feet,

So Mercury becomes obedient to our wish,

And Venus our adoring lover.

Like *Attar* we shall cross the bounds

And lose ourselves in boundless Love!

THE PATH OF LOVE

The path of Love is without end;

If you value life then stay away.

If you give your life, then learn,

A thousand are given in return.

He who shies away and saves his life

Shall be forever regretful of his fate.

Love of the Beloved enters my heart,

Announces that tonight is the night.

If your heart is annihilated for your Beloved,

Then peace is being restless and distraught.

Your first step in the field of Love

Is to be slain or reach the cross!

And then you will be burnt, so you can see

That the light of Love shines in the fire's heart.

And when you become ashes and dust,

Then you will dance reflected by the Sun.

YOU WILL NOT MOURN

You will not mourn the burning or the slaying

As that Sun is your life sustaining;

And he who is entangled in being

Is trapped, unheeding as he is unseeing.

LOVERS ARE STRANGERS

Lovers are strangers to themselves;

They are drunk with the wine of selflessness.

Away from temple and mosque,

They sit in the drinking tavern day and night.

Though they're drunk completely,

There is no Saqi or the cup or wine.

From pre-eternity they are with the spirits

And to the eternal end they are with the heavenly.

They traverse body and soul in a moment

And live undaunted in the Sufi way.

They are a hidden treasure,¹

Hence they dwell in the wilderness.

The two worlds are a mere fantasy for them;

That is why in both worlds they are a fantasy.

The two worlds are the oyster and they

The pearl that dwells within.

They know themselves, even in their drunkenness,

Enough to be unaware of themselves.

They don't care if the world exists or not,

Thus they are both mad and sane.

Whoever has dwelt in this world like *Attar*

Is free of home and hearth and the world.

MY DRUNKENNESS

My drunkenness is alien to the sober;

They do not understand this work.

Those worldly ones that sit in the church

Do not understand the sorrow of the drunkard's heart.

Those who are wrapped in the cloak of pride

Cannot see behind the veil of mystery.

Those who have not been separated from their Beloved

Will not understand my night without my Love.

Without my Beloved I was a prisoner in my home,

So that the others would not see my pain;

The sorrow of the nightingale, the yearning of the bud,

Only the flower in the garden can understand.

All who are not caught in the pain of Love

Will not find a balm for *Attar's* pain.

IN LOVE

In Love young and old are the same.

In Love loss and gain are the same.

In Love the worlds are the same.

In Love autumn and spring are the same.

Its down is up and up is down.

The earth and heavens are the same.

The place of Love is a circle,

Each spot is equal to the other.

If the Beloved scorns you or welcomes you,

It's all the same.

In the tradition of Love to die

Is the same as gaining eternal life.

HOW CAN SOBER REASON UNDERSTAND?

How can sober Reason understand

The drunkenness of Love?

How can Reason solve

The mystery of Love?

Reason is like a drop

Removed from the ocean;

How can this drop understand

The meaning of Love?

Reason has put many a stitch on it,

But no robe could it sew

To fit the body of Love.

You may hate the two worlds

With all your soul,

Yet even then,

You'll feel the warmth of Love.

Since Love is the work of the heart

Open the eyes of your heart

And look at the friends,

How drunk they are with Love!

Each being in His love,

Breathes in His love.

If you are to be annihilated

Then lose yourself in Love!

As Being entered existence

And closed its eyes for a moment

It was overwhelmed

By the tumult of Love.

Since *Attar's* heart

Did a ray from this Sun gain,

He started his journey to roam

And arrived in the desert of Love.

I HAVE BROKEN MY VOWS

Saqi, I have broken my vows,

Do pour some wine into my cup!

I have no enmity with wine.

I worship it! I worship it!

I am burnt by the hypocrites;

I am separate from the half-baked.

I am ashamed of these shameless ones

And have broken my vows in front of the idol!

I went and broke my vow

And became free of all my sins!

Happy with my fellow drinkers

I kept my promise with friends.

I am without name or fame,

But of the common folk, I'm not;

I am the slave of the wine-seller,

I worship the wine!

Belief and heart I have let go

And willing to die at the Beloved's door

I've left this world behind

And have lost my Self, my mind.

I have cast aside my robe,

Drunk the pure water divine;

Casting aside Reason's constraint,

I stand in line with drunken friends!

I turned my robe into an infidel's

Girdle and my home into a wine tavern,

Opened all the doors

And searched for deserving drinkers!

O Saqi, give me that wine!

Then do whatever comes to your mind!

Throw me out of the mosque,

As I went there drunk last night.

The tears of *Attar's* eyes

Banish sleep from me;

So drunk I am, I know not

Who I am!

IN THE PLACE OF MAJESTY

In the place of majesty, I claimed to be Sultan

And I set my camp in the camp of the Lord.

My Love, my taste, could not distinguish

Between Saqi, cup or wine,

And Muslim and unbeliever,

All I hit with Unity's stick divine.

I took out the sword of Love

From the scabbard

And without hesitation

Wielded it at Reason's neck!

WOULDST THOU INHERIT PARADISE

Wouldst thou inherit Paradise,
These maxims keep before thine eyes;
So thy heart's mirror shall appear,
For ever shining bright and clear.
Give thanks when Fortune smiles serene,
Be patient when her frown is seen;
If thou hast sinned, for pardon plead,
And help shall follow at thy need.
But shall he hope the prize to hold,
Who with new sins conceals the old?
Be penitent, be watchful still,
And fly the votaries of ill;
Avoid the paths that lead to vice,
And win thy way to Paradise.

Louisa Stuart Costello

PRAISE

Unbounded praise to God be given,
Who from His throne, the height of heaven,
Looked on this handful of frail earth –
Unnoticed man – and gave him birth.

On Adam breathed, and bade the wave
Pause, and His servant, Noah, save;
The tempest, with His terrors clad,
And swept from earth the tribe of Ad.¹

And for His 'friend', O blissful name!
To roses changed a bed of flame:
The smallest insect, at His will,
Becomes an instrument of ill.

He spoke, the sea o'erwhelms His foes,
And the hard rock a camel grows!
The iron turns, at His command,
To pliant wax, in David's hand.

To Solomon He gave his sway,
And bade the Dives² his sign obey;

To one a diadem is given,
Another's head the *saw* has riven.

Impartial in His goodness still,
Equal to all is good or ill.

One lies on Persian silk reclined,
One naked in a frozen wind;
One scarce can count his heaps of ore,
One faints with hunger at the door.

He bade a virgin's child appear,
And made an infant's witness clear.

The Dives before His vengeance fly,
By hosts of stars expelled the sky,
And kings, who hold the world in thrall,
At His great word to ruin fall.

Louisa Stuart Costello

UMAR IBN AL-FARID

(*AD 1181–1235; AH 576–632*)

The Egyptian poet Umar Ibn al-Farid is the undisputed master of Islamic mystical verse in Arabic. Born in Cairo, he lived in Mecca for a while. Ibn al-Farid spent most of his youth in retirement and meditation and, after briefly working in government service, retired to the seclusion of Al-Azhar in Cairo.

He was an inspired poet and often composed his verses while in a state of ecstasy. His poetry, though not voluminous, is considered of the very highest order. His most celebrated works are the *Qasida al-Khamriyya (The Wine Ode)* and the longer poem *Nazm al-Suluk (Poem of the Sufi Way)*, also known as *al-Ta'iyya al-Kubra (Ode Rhyming in T-Major)*, comprising more than 760 verses. He was buried in Cairo and is regarded as a saint.

THE WINE ODE

In memory of the Beloved

We drank a wine;

Intoxicated we were

With this wine before

It was created.

The full Moon is its cup

And it is the brightest Sun.

Crescent Moon passes it around

And stars appear

As it is diluted for the drinkers.

I could never reach the tavern

Without its fragrance;

I could not have imagined it

Without its sparkle and radiance.

Age has purified it to its essence

Like a secret to be kept

In the hearts of the wise.

Were it mentioned to

The others of the tribe,

They would be drunk

And incur no sin

Or shame if they imbibe.

And if it were to come

Into the mind of anyone,

Joy would be his, and sorrow

Would depart and be gone.

And in the shade of its vineyard,

If they were to lie,

The sick who were cureless

Would rise cured.

Were someone lame brought

Near to its dwelling place,

He would walk

And the mute talk

By its flavour's grace.

And were it poured

Onto a grave,

The dead would rise

Full of spirit, revived.

Were its perfume to spread

Eastward, and the deprived

Were in the West,

They too would feel its

Fragrance in their midst.

And were the revellers

To gaze at its seal,

They would be drunk,

Entranced by its appeal.

And should your hand,

By touching its cup, be stained

You will find your way at night

As a star would shine from your hand.

Put before a blind man secretly,

Its allure would make him see;

And the sound of its pouring

Would make the deaf hear again.

Were travellers to pass

Through its land, and of the wine partake,

They would be immune

If bitten by the deadliest snake.

And were a doctor to inscribe

Its name on the forehead

Of the madman, for sure,

He would his reason restore.

Its name inscribed on the banner

Of an army inspires those under it

And does indeed their hearts

Intoxicate and makes them brave.

With its intoxication,

Those who follow it are exalted

And by its inspiration,

The cowardly find strength.

And he whose hand knows not

Generosity, generous he becomes;

And he who has no forgiveness

Learns to forgive at once.

Were the ignorant one to kiss

Its stopper once,

The kissing would make him wise,

Even if he were a dunce.

They say to me,

‘Describe this wine

For you know its qualities divine.’

And I say yes

I do have knowledge of this wine!

It’s clear, but not of water.

It’s weightless, soft, but not of air.

It’s luminous, but not of fire.

It’s a spirit without body!

Older than all that was created,

Pre-eternal, before time it was,

In the long past,

When there was no shape or form.

Then from it all things were born;

And for some wise reckoning

It veiled itself from all

Who had no understanding.

And my soul loved it

And became One with it,

But did not mix or merge

As one substance with another.

Remaining separate, we converged.

There was naught before it,

Nor will an after

After it be,

And all afters

It does precede.

Beauties are all these

That teach the admirers of this wine

The art of praising it.

And so they do

In prose and verse define.

When it's mentioned,

One who knows it not

Will be full of joy on hearing

Its name,

Like a lover when he hears

The Beloved's name.

They say to me,

'You have drunk the sin.'

I say, 'Never! I have drunk

That which it would be a sin

Not to drink!'

Happy are the convent dwellers

Intoxicated by it so often, yet

They drank it not!

But they aspired to the heights!

I felt its intoxication

When still a child,

And it will remain with me

Though my bones may decay.

Hurry up and drink it pure!

But if you wish to dilute it

Be just, and what's more,

Take it from the Beloved's mouth,

For sure!

Drink it in the tavern

And pass the cup around

To the sound of music

Which adds to its charm.

For where it is, worry cannot be;

As sadness can never be

Where there is music

And revelry.

Were you drunk with it

For an hour and no more

You would feel the world your slave

To rule and command, and you its king.

There is no happiness in this world

To him who lives sober,

And one who does not die drunk with it

Will miss the benefit of fulfilment.

Let him mourn his fate

If he has spent his life

And has not in it

A stake or share!

FROM *POEM OF THE SUFI WAY*

I

The point of its teaching

is clear

as noonday light:

‘I am his ear...’

I worked hard for oneness

till I found it,

and the agent of causes

was one of my guides,

And I joined my causes together

till I lost them,

for the bond of oneness

was my best connection.

Then I freed my soul

from the two of them

and it was one,

alone as always.

I dove into the seas of union,

dove deeper still for solitude

and so recovered

the pearl without equal,

That I could hear my acts

with a seeing ear

and witness my words

with a hearing eye.

So when the nightingale mourns

in the tangled brush,

and birds in the trees

warble in reply,

Or when the flautist's notes

quiver in accord

with the strings plucked

by a singing girl's hand

As she sings poetry

whose every note

moves hearts to fly

to their *lote* tree,¹

Then I delight in my works of art
declaring my union
and company free
of the idolatry of difference.

By me the chanters' assembly
is the ear of one who reads with care;
for my sake, the open tavern
is the eye of soldiers on patrol.

No hand but mine
bound the non-Muslim's sash,
but if it is loosed to acknowledge me
my hand untied it.

So if the prayer-niche in a mosque
shines by the Qur'an within,
then a temple's altar is not disgraced
by the gospel,

And the Torah's sacred books
came from Moses to his people,
so each night through scripture
rabbis confide with God.

When a devotee falls down
before an idol temple's stones,
do not transgress
and censure from bigotry.

For many of those free
from the idol's shame
are bound secretly within
to worship cash and coin!

My warning has reached
those who heed,
and by me absolution has arisen
for all who broke away:

The eyes of every faith
have never strayed,
nor did the thoughts of any creed
ever swerve aside.

One dazed in desire for the Sun
is not deranged,
for it shines from the light

of my blazing splendour, unveiled.

And when the Magi worship the fire

that, tradition tells,

has been burning bright

for a thousand years,

They aim only for me,

though they do not show

a firm resolve

as they seek another.

They saw the flash of my light once

and supposed it to be a fire,

so they went astray, misled

by shining rays.

If not for the veil of being

I would speak out,

yet respect for the laws of sense

keeps me silent.

II

... From his light,

the niche of my essence enlightened me;

by means of me,

my nights blazed morning bright.

I made me witness my being there,

for I was he;

I witnessed him as me,

the light, my splendour.

By me the valley was made holy

and I flung my robe of honour –

my ‘taking off of sandals’ –

on those summoned there.

I embraced my lights

and so was their guide;

how wondrous a soul

illuminating lights!

I set firm my many Sinais

and there prayed to myself;

I attained every goal,

as my being spoke with me.

My full Moon never waned;
my Sun, it never set,
and all the blazing stars
followed my lead.

By my leave, in my realm
planets moved,
and angels bowed
to my dominion.

In the world of remembrance
the soul has her ancient lore;
my young disciples
seek it from me,

So hurry to my union old
where I have found
the elders of the tribe
as newborn babes,

For my friends drink
what I left behind,
while those before me,
their fine qualities fall short of mine.

WITH MY BELOVED

With my Beloved I alone have been,
When secrets tenderer than evening airs
Passed, and the Vision blest
Was granted to my prayers,
That crowned me, else obscure, with endless fame,
The while amazed between
His Beauty and His Majesty
I stood in silent ecstasy,
Revealing that which o'er my spirit went and came.
Lo, in His face commingled
Is every charm and grace;
The whole of Beauty singled
Into a perfect face
Beholding Him would cry,
'There is no God but He, and He is the most High.'

R. A. Nicholson

GIVE ME EXCESS OF LOVE

Give me excess of love and so increase me

In marvelling at Thee; and mercy have

Upon a heart for Thee by passion seared.

And when I ask of Thee that I may see Thee

Even as Thou art, in Thy reality,

Say not, 'Thou shalt not see,' but let me see.

Heart, thou didst promise patience in love of them.

Take heed and be not troubled, be not anguished.

Verily love is life, so die in love,

And claim thy right to die, all sins forgiven.

Tell those before me and those after me,

And whoso witness of my sorrow was:

Learn from me, my example take, and hear me,

And tell mankind the story of my love.

Alone with the Beloved I have been:

A secret subtler than wind's lightest breath,

When on the night it steals, between us passed;

He granted to my gaze a longed for sight,

Whence I, till then unknown, illustrious am.

Between His Beauty and His Majesty

I marvelled, and my state of marvelling
Was like an eloquent tongue that spake of me.
Turn then thy looks unto His Countenance,
To find the whole of beauty lineate there.
All beauty, if it gathered were and made
One perfect form, beholding Him, would say,
'There is no god but God; God is most great.'

Martin Lings

MOHYUDDIN IBN ‘ARABI

(*AD 1165–1240; AH 560–637*)

Mohyuddin Ibn ‘Arabi is universally acknowledged as the greatest mystic of Islam. He is often referred to as the *Shaykh ul Aakbar* (The Greatest Sheikh) and credited with the doctrine of *Wahdatul Wujud* (Unity of Being). Born at Medinat Mursiya (present-day Murcia) in Spain on 28 July 1165, he began his theological studies at Seville in 1172 and in 1201 travelled to the East to make the [hajj](#). He lived in Egypt, the Hejaz, Baghdad, Mosul and Asia Minor, and died at Damascus on 16 November 1240.

He was a writer of colossal energy, composing some 150 works, the most celebrated being his two great mystical treatises *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) and *Fusus al-Hikam* (variously translated as *The Seals of Wisdom*, *The Bezels of Wisdom* or *Wisdom of the Prophets*). Like many great mystics Ibn ‘Arabi was also a poet, famous for his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (*The Interpreter of Desires*), a collection of ghazals accompanied by lengthy commentaries, written to ward off criticism from orthodox Muslims.

No other mystic poet (with the exception of Jalaluddin Rumi) has surpassed Ibn ‘Arabi in influence and output. The following poems come from *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, complete with a commentary by the poet. This commentary is essential to the poems and offers an insight into the symbolic nature of Sufi verse.

WHEN THEY DEPARTED

1. When they departed, endurance and patience departed. They departed, although they were dwelling in the core of my heart.
2. I asked them where the travellers rested at noon, and I was answered, 'Their noonday resting-place is where the *shih* and the *ban* trees diffuse a sweet scent.'
3. Then I said to the wind, 'Go and overtake them, for they are biding in the shade of the grove,
4. And bear to them a greeting from a sorrowful man in whose heart are sorrows because he is separated from his people.'

Commentary

1. *they departed*: The Divine Ideas. They were dwelling in the core of my heart. The Divine Ideas have no relationship except with their object, which is God; and God dwells in the heart, according to the Tradition: 'Neither My earth nor My heaven contains Me, but I am contained in the heart of My servant who believes.' Since, however, no manifestation was vouchsafed to him at this moment, the Ideas, being objects of vision, disappeared, notwithstanding that God was in his heart.
2. *I asked them*: The gnostics and the real existences of the past sheikhs who were my guides on the mystic Way.

Their noonday resting-place...: They reposed in every heart where the *sighs* (*Anfas*) of longing appeared, for *shih* denotes inclination (*mayl*) and *ban* absence (*bu'd*).

3. *I said to the wind*: I sent a sigh of longing after them in the hope of causing them to return to me. *in the shade of the grove*: Among the *arak* trees, whereof the wood is used as a toothpick. He refers to the Tradition: 'The use of the tooth-stick purifies the mouth and pleases the Lord,' i.e., the Divine Ideas are dwelling in the abode of purity.

AS I KISSED THE BLACK STONE

1. As I kissed the Black Stone, friendly women thronged around me; they came to perform the circumambulation with veiled faces.
2. They uncovered the [faces like] sunbeams and said to me, 'Beware! for the death of the soul is in thy looking at us.'
3. How many aspiring souls have we killed already at *al-Muhassab of Mina*, beside the pebble-heaps,
4. And in *Sarhat al-Wadi* and the mountains of Rama and *Jam'* and at the dispersion from 'Arafat?
5. Dost not thou see that beauty robs him who hath modesty, and therefore it is called the robber of virtues?
6. Our trysting-place after the circumambulation is at Zamzam beside the midmost tent, beside the rocks.
7. There everyone whom anguish hath emaciated is restored to health by the love-desire that perfumed women stir in him.
8. When they are afraid they let fall their hair, so that they are hidden by their tresses as it were by robes of darkness.'

Commentary

1. *As I kissed the Black Stone*: When the Holy Hand was outstretched to me that I might take upon it the Divine oath of allegiance, referring to the verse 'Those who pay you homage are in fact paying homage to God – the hand of God rests above their own.' (Qur'an 48:10).

friendly women: The angels hovering around the throne of God (Qur'an 39:75).

2. *the death of the soul...* : These spirits say, 'Do not look at us, lest thou fall passionately in love with us. Thou wert created for God, not for us, and if thou wilt be veiled by us from Him, He will cause thee to pass away from thy existence through Him and thou wilt perish.'

3. *have we killed*: Spirits like unto us, for the above-mentioned angels who hover around the throne of God have no relationship except with pilgrims circumambulating the Kaaba.

5. *beauty robs him who hath modesty*: Since the vision of Beauty enraptures whosoever beholds it.

the robber of virtues: It takes away all delight in the vision of beauty from him who acts at the bidding of the possessor of this beauty; and sometimes the beautiful one bids thee do that which stands between thee and glorious things, inasmuch as those things are gained by means of hateful actions: the Tradition declares that Paradise is encompassed by things which thou dislikest (*makkara*).

6. *at Zamzam*: In the station of the life which thou yearnest for.

beside the midmost tent: The intermediate world (*albarzaq*), which divides the spiritual from the corporeal world.

beside the rocks: The sensible bodies in which the holy spiritual beings (*Al Maaniyul Qudsiyya*) take their abode. He means that these spirits in these imaginary forms are metaphorical and transient, for they vanish from the dreamer as soon as he wakes and from the seer as soon as he returns to his senses. He warns thee not to be deceived by the manifestations of phenomenal beauty, inasmuch as all save God is unreal, i.e. not-being like unto thyself; therefore be His that He may be thine.

7. In the intermediate world (*al-barzaq*) whosoever loves these spiritual beings dwelling in sensible bodies derives refreshment from the world of breaths and scents (*Alam al-Anfas o Rawayeh*) because the spirit and the form are there united, so that the delight is double.

8. When these phantoms are afraid that their absoluteness will be limited by their confinement in forms, they cause thee to perceive that they are a veil which hides something more subtle than what thou seest, and conceal themselves from thee and quit these forms and once more enjoy infinite freedom.

O DOVES THAT HAUNT

1. O doves that haunt the *arak* and *ban* trees, have pity! Do not double my woes by your lamentation!
2. Have pity! Do not reveal, by wailing and weeping, my hidden desires and my secret sorrows!
3. I respond to her, at eve and morn, with the plaintive cry of a longing man and the moan of an impassioned lover.
4. The spirits faced one another in the thicket of *ghada* trees and bent their branches towards me, and it [the bending] annihilated me;
5. And they brought me divers sorts of tormenting desire and passion and untried affliction.
6. Who will give me sure promise of *Jam'* and al-Muhassab of Mina? Who of *Dhat al-Athl*? Who of *Na'man*?
7. They encompass my heart moment after moment, for the sake of love and anguish, and kiss my pillars,
8. Even as the best of mankind encompassed the Kaaba, which the evidence of Reason proclaims to be imperfect,
9. And kissed stones therein, although he was a Natiq [prophet]. And what is the rank of the Temple in comparison with the dignity of Man?
10. How often did they vow and swear that they would not change, but one dyed with henna does not keep oaths.
11. And one of the most wonderful things is a veiled gazelle, who points with red fingertip and winks with eyelids,
12. A gazelle whose pasture is between the breastbones and the bowels. O marvel! a garden amidst fires!
13. My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent

for Christian monks,

14. And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaaba and the tables of the Torah and the book of the [Qur'an](#).
15. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.
16. We have a pattern in Bishr, the lover of Hind and her sister, and in Qays and Lubna and in Mayya and Ghaylan.

Commentary

1. *O doves*: The influences of holiness and purity.
3. *I respond to her*: I repeat to her what she says to me, as God said to the soul when He created her, 'Who am I?' and she answered, 'Who am I?' referring to her qualities, whereupon He caused her to dwell four thousand years in the sea of despair and indigence and abasement until she said to Him, 'Thou art my Lord.'
4. *faced one another*: Because love entails the union of two opposites.

in the thicket of ghada trees: The fires of love.

branches: Flames.

annihilated me: In order that He alone might exist, not I, through jealousy that the lover should have any existence in himself apart from his Beloved.

6. *Jam'*: Union with the loved ones in the station of proximity, which is *al-Muzdalifa*.

al-Muhassab: The place where the thoughts which prevent lovers from attaining their object of desire are cast out.

Dhat al-Athl: Referring to the principle (*athl*) for it is the principle in love that thou shouldst be the very essence of thy Beloved and shouldst disappear in Him from thyself.

Na'man: The place of divine and holy bliss (*naeem*).

7. *for the sake of love and anguish*: In order to inspire me with passion.

and kiss my pillars (properly, kiss over the *litham* or veil covering the mouth): He is veiled and unable to behold them except through a medium (*wasta*). The *pillars* are the four elements on which the human constitution is based.

10. *one dyed with henna*: He refers to sensual influences (*wardat-e-nafsiya*), such as descended on the soul when God addressed it and said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ (Qur’an 7:171), and received from it a promise and covenant. Then it did not faithfully keep the station of unification (*Altauheed*), but followed other gods. No one was exempt from this polytheism, for every one said, ‘I did’ and ‘I said’, at the time when he forgot to contemplate the Divine Agent and Speaker within him.

11. *a veiled gazelle*: A divine subtlety (*lateefa*), veiled by a sensual state (*Halat al-Nafsiyya*), in reference to the unknown spiritual feelings (*ahwaal*) of gnostics, who cannot explain their feelings to other men; they can only indicate them symbolically to those who have begun to experience the like.

with red fingertip: He means the same thing as he meant by *one dyed with henna* in the last verse.

and winks with eyelids: The speculative proofs concerning the principles of gnostics are valid only for those who have already been imbued with the rudiments of this experience. Gnostics, though they resemble the vulgar outwardly, are Divines (*Rabbaniyun*) inwardly.

12. *whose pasture...*: As ‘Ali said, striking his breast, ‘Here are sciences in plenty, could I but find people to carry them [in their minds].’

a garden amidst fires: Manifold sciences which, strange to say, are not consumed by the flames of love in his breast. The reason is that these sciences are produced by the fires of seeking and longing, and therefore, like the salamander, are not destroyed by them.

13. *My heart has become capable of every form*: As another has said, ‘The heart [*AlQalb*] is so called from its changing [*Taqqaluba*],’ for it varies according to the various influences by which it is affected in consequence of the variety of its states of feeling (*Ahwaal*); and the variety of its feelings is due to the variety of the divine manifestations that appear to its inmost ground (*sirr*). The religious law gives to this

phenomenon the name of 'transformation'.

a pasture for gazelles: i.e., for the objects of his love.

a convent for Christian monks: Inasmuch as he makes the loved ones to be monks, he calls the heart a convent.

14. *a temple for idols:* i.e., for the Divine Realities that men seek and for whose sake they worship God.

the pilgrim's Kaaba: Because his heart is encompassed by exalted spirits.

the tables of the Torah: His heart is a table on which are inscribed the Mosaic sciences that have accrued to him.

the book of the Qur'an: Because his heart has received an inheritance of the perfect Muhammadan knowledge.

15. *I follow the religion of Love:* A reference to the verse 'If you love God, follow me and God will return your love' (Qur'an 3:29).

whatever way Love's camels take...: 'I accept willingly and gladly whatever burden He lays upon me. No religion is more sublime than a religion based on love and longing for Him whom I worship and in whom I have faith.' This is a peculiar prerogative of Muslims, for the station of perfect love is appropriated to Muhammad beyond any other prophet, since God took him as His Beloved (*habib*).

16. He says, 'Love, qua love, is one and the same reality to those Arab lovers and to me, but the objects of our love are different, for they loved a phenomenon, whereas I love the Essential.' 'We have a pattern in them,' because God only afflicted them with love for human beings like themselves in order that He might show, by means of them, the falseness of those who pretend to love Him and yet feel no such transport and rapture in loving Him as deprived those enamoured men of their reason and made them unconscious of themselves.

R. A. Nicholson

THEIR ABODES HAVE BECOME DECAYED

1. Their abodes have become decayed, but desire of them is ever new in my heart and decayeth not.
2. These tears are shed over their ruined dwellings, but souls are ever melted at the memory of them.
3. Through love of them I called out behind their riding-camels, 'O ye who are rich in beauty, here am I, a beggar!
4. I have rolled my cheek in the dust in tender and passionate affection: then, by the true love which I owe to you, do not make hopeless
5. One who is drowned in his tears and burned in the fire of sorrow with no respite!
6. O thou who wouldst kindle a fire, be not hasty! Here is the fire of passion. Go and take of it!

Commentary

1. *Their abodes have become decayed*: He says, 'The places of austerities and mortifications, where the Divine Names made works (*A'mal*) their abode, have become decayed through age and loss of youthful strength.' The word *rubu'* is used in reference to the springtide (*rabi'*) of human life.
3. *behind their riding-camels*: The powers of youth and the delights of the commencement (*al-badiyah*).
4. *I have rolled my cheek in the dust*: i.e., desiring to be united with you, for God says, 'Seek access to Me by means of that which I have not,' viz., abasement and indigence.
6. *Here is the fire of passion*: In my heart.

R. A. Nicholson

HE SAW THE LIGHTNING

1. He saw the lightning in the east and he longed for the east, but if it had flashed in the west he would have longed for the west.
2. My desire is for the lightning and its gleam, not for the places and the earth.
3. The east wind related to me from them a tradition handed down successively from distracted thoughts, from my passion, from anguish, from my tribulation,
4. From rapture, from my reason, from yearning, from ardour, from tears, from my eyelid, from fire, from my heart,
5. That ‘He whom thou lovest is between thy ribs; the breaths toss him from side to side.’
6. I said to the east wind, ‘Bring a message to him and say that he is the enkindler of the fire within my heart.
7. If it shall be quenched, then everlasting union, and if it shall burn, then no blame to the lover!’

Commentary

1. He refers to the vision of God in created things, viz., the manifestation in forms, and this causes him to cleave to phenomena, because the manifestation appears in them.

the east: The place of phenomenal manifestation.

if it had flashed in the west: If it had been a manifestation of the Divine essence to the lover’s heart, he would have longed for that purer manifestation in the world of purity and mystery.
2. He says, ‘I desire the forms in which the manifestation takes place only in so far as they are a locus for the manifestation itself.’
3. The world of breaths (*alam-e-anfas*) communicated to me the inward meaning of these phenomenal forms.
4. *rapture* (*sukr*: literally, ‘intoxication’): The fourth degree in the manifestations. The first degree is *Zauq*, the second *Shurb*, and the third *ri*’.

from my reason: Because intoxication transports the reason, and takes away from it whatever it has.

5. *the breaths...*: i.e., the overwhelming awe inspired by this manifestation produces in him various ecstasies (*Ahwaal*).
7. He says, 'If the awful might of this manifestation shall be veiled through the permanence of the Divine substance, then the union will be lasting; but if the manifestation be unchecked, it will sweep away all that exists in its locus, and those who perish are not in fault.' This is the saying of one possessed and mastered by ecstasy.

R. A. Nicholson

HALT AT THE ABODES AND WEEP

1. Halt at the abodes and weep over the ruins and ask the decayed habitations a question.
2. ‘Where are the loved ones? Where are their camels gone?’ [They answer], ‘Behold them traversing the vapour, in the desert.
3. Thou seest them in the mirage like gardens: the vapour makes large in the eyes the figure [of one who walks in it].’
4. They went, desiring al-‘Udhayb, that they might drink there a cool, life-giving fountain.
5. I followed, asking the zephyr about them, whether they have pitched tents or have sought the shade of the *dal* tree.
6. The zephyr said, ‘I left their tents at Zarud, and the camels were complaining of fatigue from their night-journey.
7. They had let down over the tents coverings to protect their beauty from the heat of noon.
8. Rise, then, and go towards them, seeking their traces, and drive thy camels speedily in their direction.
9. And when thou wilt stop at the landmarks of Hajir and cross dales and hills there,
10. Their abodes will be near and their fire will be clearly seen – a fire which has caused the flame of love to blaze.
11. Make the camels kneel! Let not its lions affright thee, for longing love will present them to thine eyes in the form of cubs.’

Commentary

1. He says to the voice of God (*Daiy al Haq*) calling from his heart, *Halt at the abodes*, i.e., the stations where gnostics alight in the course of their journey to infinite knowledge of their object of worship.

and weep over the ruins: the traces left by those gnostics, since I cannot

accompany them.

the decayed habitations: Because there is no joy in the abodes which have been deserted, and their very existence depends on those who dwell in them.

2. *their camels*: their aspirations.

the vapour: the evidences (*dala'ils*) of that which they seek, for its evidences are attached to its being found in themselves.

the desert: the station of abstraction.

3. *makes large*: They are grand because they give evidence of the grandeur of that which they seek. Hence it is said, 'In order that he who was not (namely, thou) may pass away, and He who never was not (namely, God) may subsist for ever.' And God said, 'Like a mirage in a far-flung plain [i.e., the station of humility]... when he arrives thereto, he finds it to be nothing, but there he finds God' (Qur'an 24:39), inasmuch as all secondary causes have been cut off from him. Accordingly, the author says that *the vapour makes large*, etc., meaning that man's superiority over all other contingent beings consists in his giving stronger evidence of God, since he is the most perfect organism, as the Prophet said, 'Verily he was created in the image of the Merciful.'

4. *desiring al-'Udhayb*: Seeking the mystery of life in the station of purity from the fountain of liberality.

that they might drink: *Shurb* is the second degree of divine manifestation (*tajjali*), *dhawq* being the first.

5. *whether they have pitched tents*: Referring to knowledge acquired by them.

or have sought the shade of the dal tree: Referring to knowledge divinely bestowed, in which their actions have no part. *Dal* implies bewilderment (*haira*).

6. *at Zarud*: A great tract of sand in the desert: inasmuch as sand is often tossed by the wind from one place to another, he indicates that they are in a state of unrest, because they are seeking that which is unimaginable, and of which only the traces are to be found in the soul.

7. *coverings to protect their beauty*: Unless their faces, viz., their realities, were veiled,

the intense radiance of this station would consume them.

8. *seeking their traces*: He says, 'Seek to approach the degree of the prophets with thy aspiration [this he indicates by the word *camels*], but not by immediate experience [*hal*], for only the Prophet has immediate experience of this station.' There is nothing, however, to prevent anyone from aspiring to it, although it is unattainable.
9. *Hajir*: Referring to the obstacle which makes immediate experience of this station impossible for us.
10. *their fire will be clearly seen*: i.e., the perils into which they plunged before they could arrive at these abodes. According to the Tradition, 'Paradise is encompassed with hateful actions.'

One of the illuminati (*almukashifin*) told me at al-Mawsil that he had seen in a dream Ma'ruf al-Karkhi sitting in the midst of hell-fire. The dream terrified him and he did not perceive its meaning. I said to him, 'That fire is the enclosure that guards the abode in which you saw him seated. Let anyone who desires to reach that abode plunge into the fire.' My friend was pleased with this explanation and recognized that it was true.

11. *Let not its lions affright thee*: If thou art a true lover, be not dismayed by the dangers confronting thee.

in the form of cubs: i.e., innocuous and of no account.

R. A. Nicholson

O ANCIENT TEMPLE

1. O ancient temple, there hath risen for you a light that gleams in our hearts.
2. I complain to thee of the deserts which I crossed, where I let my tears flow unchecked,
3. Taking no joy in rest at dawn or dusk, continuing from morn to morn and passing from eve to eve.
4. Truly, the camels, even if they suffer from footsoreness, journey by night and make haste in their journey.
5. These beasts of burden carried us to you with eager desire, though they did not hope to attain thereby.
6. They traversed wildernesses and well-nigh rainless lands, impelled by passion, but they did not therefore complain of fatigue.
7. They did not complain of the anguish of love, and 'tis I who complain of fatigue. Indeed, I have claimed something absurd.

Commentary

1. *O ancient temple*: The gnostic's heart, which contains the reality of Truth.

there hath risen for you...: The light in the heart (which is the centre of the body) seeks to rise from its source and convey to the members of the body the divine realities. In this station a man sees by God, hears by God, speaks by God, and moves by God.

2. *the deserts which I crossed*: The mortifications and austerities which I suffered.

4. *the camels*: The aspirations. He means that they do not cease from seeking, although exhausted by the difficulty of their quest. They are exhausted because the proofs supplied by the understanding are unable to lead them to the divine reality.

7. *I have claimed something absurd*: I pretend to love God, while complaining of distress and fatigue, yet these 'beasts of burden', viz., my acts and thoughts, which I control and govern, make no complaint.

THE SOUL'S REMORSE

I remembered my sins; they troubled me and made me weep,

Because they are banishing me from God's proximity.

How can there be salvation for the way I have wasted my life?

The Lord will question me about it on the Resurrection Day.

If only my ears had not heard words of passion,

If only my eyes had not seen any beauty,

If only neither my palm nor foot had been created,

Nor even my tongue, and my heart had not existed,

Or else I had been created to lead a life of bliss,

Then, both publicly and privately, my Lord would have given me success,

And I would not have adored anyone who would be of no benefit,

When, on the Resurrection Day, the Merciful would question me about it.

If only I hadn't grieved for places with which I was intimate.

If only I hadn't yearned for certain dwellings and encampments.

If only I hadn't flirted with white prima donnas

As they sang on couches lamenting my fate.

If only I hadn't drunk vintage wine,

Stored up since the days of Ibn Dhi Yazan.

If only I hadn't hoped for things unattainable.

If only I hadn't wasted my time in the causes of destruction.

If only I hadn't made speeches about science and knowledge,

Until they called me the clever scholar.

The cursed *Iblis* [Satan] still toyed with me

And the agony of my sin was burning me within.

For how long shall I continue to sin and be grieved by it?

And You – may Your name be praised – protect me.

The mornings and evenings I spend in things

That draw me to misfortune and further from fortune.

How often have I struggled with him [*Iblis*], hidden from God's servants,

While the eye of God was watching me!

Even the sense of shame before the Merciful does not deter me

From sins which, if He wills, could destroy me,

And no friend among the brethren could arouse me

From the sleep conveying me to God's punishment.

I have no friend save the one who sees my error

And offers me advice from time to time.

The true friend is like soap that washes garments clean

From dirt or filth or squalor.

Then, on my right, I heard my companion,

Prodding, warning and restraining me:

'O master, may God protect you, listen to me please.

Many a time have I come and the doorman has barred my way.

He is not a human being whom you can beat or harm,

But your action which will be raised in the shroud [of death].

Look at him and improve the image that he creates.

He is courteous if from the world you become estranged.

It is he who keeps your two enemies at bay [the world and the devil]

If they entice you, and this is one of the greatest of blessings.'

Hearing his advice, my soul yearned after it,

And said, 'Will the Merciful accept me?'

'O soul,' I replied, 'whatever course you take,

He will come rushing towards you with blessings and bounty.'

O my friend, may God preserve you!

I was afraid that you would say, in a bitter tone,

Like one who, in his goal, has strayed from the proper way,

'I feel sorry for myself and I weep for my negligence,

I lament for the heart that has erred from the path of goodness.'

If proximity to my God can be measured

By my heart's proximity to Him, then indeed I am far away.

If He were to reward me for what I have done,

Then what reward would there be but to be turned roughly away!

But I have hope in Him, both secretly and openly,

And if this passion is useful to me, then how fortunate I shall be!

If I am like a full Moon whose light has been dimmed by ignorance,

Then God will very soon give me back its bliss.

Neither my sin, nor my misguided action, will remove me far from Him;

Therefore my offence is more befitting for me as a slave.

Just as generosity, beautiful clemency, together with approbation,

Are the most appropriate things to coexist with the majesty of God,

So gracious majesty is the constant attribute of the Creator,

And faith truly resides in me. Let happiness be mine!

Roger Boase

JALALUDDIN RUMI

(AD 1207–73; AH 604–72)

According to tradition, Jalaluddin Rumi, the greatest mystic poet of Islamic literature, was born in Balkh, one of the major cities of Khorasan (modern Afghanistan). His family moved west to the Anatolian city of Konya (now in modern Turkey), the capital of the Seljuq Sultanate of Rum – hence ‘Rumi’ – where he lived most of his life.

When his father died in 1230, Rumi succeeded him as an orthodox professor of theology. The great turning point in his life came when he met the wandering Sufi mystic (or dervish) Shamsuddin Tabrizi, a spiritual guide who aroused Rumi’s passionate devotion. Tabrizi’s mysterious disappearance in 1247 led Rumi to produce some of his most inspired verse.

His six-volume *Masnavi* is seen by many to be an interpretation of the essence of Islamic thought and ideas and a distillation of many of the verses of the Qur’an. Sometimes referred to as the Qur’an in the Persian language, Rumi’s *Masnavi* has been translated into many languages and is studied throughout the Islamic world.

Rumi’s major works are his *Masnavi* and the *Divan-e-Shams-e Tabrizi*, a collection of ghazals and [rubais](#). His most important prose work is *Fihi Ma Fihi (In It What’s In It)*, a record of his lectures and talks.

Rumi was also the founder of the Mevlevi Order of ‘Dancing [Dervishes](#)’. He died on 17 December 1273 in Konya and was laid to rest beside his father. The epitaph on his shrine, the Yeşil Türbe (Green Tomb), reads: ‘When we are dead, seek not our tomb in the earth, but find it in the hearts of men.’

IF YOU SEEK LOVE

If you seek Love

And are a lover of Love,

Take a sharp knife in your hand

And slit the throat of self-restraint.

Nothing is a hindrance more

Than fear of losing your good name;

It's a saying made without gain;

Accept it with a mind that's pure.

Why did that madness seize *Majnun*

In many forms?

Why did beauty choose so many

Wives?

He rent his robe, he climbed mountains;

He sipped poison, he tasted death.

The spider caught a prey so large;¹

How much larger will the Lord's snare be!

Since *Leila's* face had value such,

How much more the worth of the nocturnal journey!²

Have you not heard of *Waisa* and *Ramin*

Have you not heard of *Wamiq* and *Azra*?³

You gather your garment away from water;

But if need be you must dive in the river!

The way of Love is drunkenness and being low

The torrent runs not upward but from high to low.

You will be the jewel in the ring of lovers

If you are in the circle of the jewel master,

As the sky is enthralled by earth,

As the body is enthralled by the soul.

Beat not your drum that none can hear;

Plant bravely your banner in the desert's heart!

Listen to the voices with the ear of your soul,

The many voices rising up under the green dome.

When your garment is removed by Love,

The firmament will stare aghast.

The universe is in turmoil because of Love;

It purifies all above and below.

When the Sun rose, the night vanished;

When bounty came, affliction was banished.

I am silent.

Speak, O soul of soul of soul,

Each atom speaks

Desiring your face.

MY DESIRE

Show us your face;

We desire the garden.

Open your lips;

We desire sweetness.

Show your face, Sun,

From the veil of cloud;

I desire blinding radiance.

O morning breeze, blowing

From the friend's garden,

Bring me the sweet fragrance

I desire!

Destiny is a treacherous flood.

I am a fish; I desire the ocean!

Like Jacob I in sorrow weep;

I desire fair Joseph's face!

Without you the city is a prison;

I desire to wander the mountains and deserts!

In one hand the wine cup,

In the other my Beloved's hair

Dancing in the city square

With all passion afire,

That is my desire!

Weary and mean-spirited companions

make me weary.

I desire a Lion of God¹ or a Rostam²

With me!

Every being can great things attain.

That mine of Beauty, I desire

To gain.

Bankrupt I am, but will not accept

A small diamond, I desire the diamond mine!

Full of complaint of mankind,

Weary and weak,

I desire the drunkard's

Lamentation; that is what I seek!

My soul is weary of Pharaoh's tyranny

I desire the light of Moses!

They say that he cannot be found;

They have searched long.

I desire that which cannot be found!

My song is stifled by envy,

Sweeter than the nightingale,

But my lips are sealed.

I desire to complain!

The Master roamed the streets

With lamp in hand, crying:

‘I’m tired of devil and beast!

I demand a man!’

My work has gone beyond desire and longing

I want to move from place and being.

I desire the essence of existence!

He is hidden

And the creator of all things;

I desire Him

Who is manifest in everything!

I am intoxicated with the wine of faith

I desire the body, the form, the limbs of faith!

I am love's lute and love is mine

I desire the hands and style of Uthman!³

Each moment the [rabab](#) exclaims:

I desire the Mercy of the Merciful!

O singer, sing the rest of this ode

In this way,

That is my desire, I pray!

Arise, O Sun, you are the glory of Tabriz!

Dawn of Love!

I desire to be the hoopoe bird⁴

In the court of Solomon!

MY SOUL

My soul is mingled with Thee, dissolved in Thee,

A soul to cherish as it has Thy perfume!

Each drop of blood of mine

Is saying to Thy dust,

‘I am the colour for Your love,

Companion of Your affection.

In this house of clay, my heart is desolate

Without Thee!

O Beloved, come into this house

Or else I’ll be gone!’

THE VOICE OF LOVE

The voice of Love,

Each moment comes,

From everywhere.

We were in heaven once,

We were friends to angels once,

To that place let us return;

That is our country, our home.

Higher than heavens, we are.

Greater than angels, we are.

Why not leave them both behind?

Our goal is Majesty, Divine.

How far apart, this dust,

From what is substance pure;

Though we came down,

Let's return up once more.

Youthful fortune is our friend;

Our work: to give our soul to Him.

The leader of our caravan,

Glory of the world, *Mustafa!*

This sweet fragrance of the breeze

Comes from His flowing tresses.

The radiance of our thought

Illumined 'by the morning bright'.¹

By his look the Moon was cleft;

She could not bear the sight;

Fortunate was the Moon,

That humble beggar of the sky.

Each moment come and see

The cleaving of the Moon, our hearts.

Why does the vision of that vision

Not grace your eyes?

The wave of 'Am I Not'²

Came and wrecked the body's ship.

Once more that ship shall wreck

When the body attains union again.

Like fowl and fish, from the ocean

Of the soul,

Man has emerged;

Once risen from the sea

Why should this bird

Make his home the earthly tree?

Yet we are pearls of that sea

And that is where we shall abide.

Why else should waves emerge

From the sea of soul, and create this urge?

The time of Union

Is the time of eternal Beauty.

The time of favour and bounty

Is the ocean of perfect purity.

The wave of Bounty has appeared;

The thunder of the sea arrived.

The dawn of Blessedness has dawned.

Not the Morn, it is the light of God

That's dawned!

What is this picture, form?

Who the king and who the prince?

What is wisdom?

All are veils.

The veils are removed

Through this ecstasy!

The spring of this wine

Is in your very head and eyes.

In your head itself there's nothing,

But you have two heads:

One of clay

The other of heaven's substance

Pure.

So many pure heads

Under the earth do lie

That you can know that this head

Depends on the other head;

The other head is hidden from sight,

This head apparent.

Just as behind the manifest world

Lies the infinite universe!

Tie up the water source, cup-bearer,

Bring wine from the jar;

The vessel of perception

Is narrower than the narrowest pass.

The Sun³ of Truth shone

From Tabriz, and I said to him:

‘Thy light is one with all,

Apart from all.’

ENTER THE TUMULTUOUS NIGHT

Enter the tumultuous night

And from its ocean gather gifts unnamed.

The night hides the Beauty of the hidden;

The day cannot compare with mysterious night.

Sleep he will not want, and sleep unsound

He who has not seen the magical night.

Many pure hearts and minds

Are nothing but slaves to the night.

The night is but an empty black pot

If you haven't tasted the sweetness offered by night.

The way is long, God speed, O friends,

If you want to discover the mystery of the night.

The trade of day is in commerce;

It's quite another trade at night!

You are the Sun, O *Shamsuddin*,

Pride of Tabriz,

The desire of day and night!

TODAY

Today I sit with wine and drinkers.

Today I do not need the puritan or the chaste.

Today none asks what is the drink or who is drunk.

Today the Saqi hands the wine and smiles.

Talk not of the night of separation today.

Today I meet my Beloved and embrace.

Today is celebration and song and Saqi's eyes.

Today the cup, the jug and wine.

Today I'm drunk and forget morning, noon and night.

Today time passes, and we do not know it's passed.

Today all is tumult and all is joy and mischief,

The gathering is alive with presence divine.

Forgetting of our selves, we worship the wine.

Today all we desire is the Saqi's bounty.

Today *Shams of Tabriz* showed his rivals the way

By the wine of Oneness, not by trivial talk.

WHERE IS THE WAY?

Where is the way that I was treading?

I avoid it as it was the wrong way.

One moment spent away from the Beloved's street

Is forbidden in the religion of the lovers.

Still I say: the path is not easy,

A thousand traps greet each and every step.

O restless heart, come not this way.

Stay at a place that suits you best.

Stay where life is nourished,

Ask for that wine that lightens the soul.

All else is but mere appearance, colour, form;

All else is mere battle for name and fame.

Be silent and sit beside at the feet of he

Who is drunk, and all around him drunk.

O Glory of Belief, *Shamsuddin*,

To Thee I am enslaved body and soul!

ON THIS PATH OF LOVE SUBLIME

On this path of Love sublime,

Anything else is idolatry;

Anything else but light of union,

On this path is unbelief.

If you only see the Beloved,

Your eyes are faulty;

The truthful eye of the lover

Must look to God alone.

Pass by the world of everyday

And drink the wine of Allah's Way.

Drink of Love, that is life's elixir pure.

What use has the lover of this world?

The spirit of the Lover pure

Goes beyond the way of this world.

In the calamity of poverty lies

A kingly secret;

Adopt poverty, O traveller,

For that's the Prophet's Way.

He's worshipped by angels.

He is unique and unrivalled.

His dwelling place, beyond the

World we know.

O Glory of *Tabriz*, Sun of Truth,

Find not fault in me!

In my heart and soul

A fire burns for Thee!

WHO AM I?

What can I do my friends, if I do not know?

I am neither Christian nor Jew, nor Muslim nor Hindu.

What can I do? What can I do?

Not of the East, nor of the West,

Not of the land, nor of the sea,

Not of nature's essence, nor of circling heavens.

What could I be?

Not of earth, nor of water,

Nor of fire, nor of air,

Not of the land, nor of the sky,

Not of being, nor of existence.

Neither Indian nor Chinese, nor Bulgar am I;

Nor do I come from Iraq or Saqsin,

Nor from Khurasan's earth am I!

I am not of this world or the next,

Nor of paradise or hell am I.

My place is the placeless.

My trace is the traceless.

I have no body or soul,

'Cause I belong to my Beloved

Entire whole.

I have cast aside duality and embraced Oneness.

One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call;

He is the first, He is the last, He is the external,

He is the innermost.

I know naught but Him within, without.

Drunk with love, I've lost track of the two worlds.

Nothing I know but drunkenness and revelry!

Were I to spend a moment without Thee,

I would repent of that moment and that life.

Were I to win Thy company for a moment,

I would exchange the two worlds and trample on them.

O *Shams-e-Tabrizi*, I'm so drunk in this world

That I can only talk of drunkenness and love!

THE SONG OF THE FLUTE

Listen to the story that the flute does tell.

Its plaintive song on separation dwells:

‘Ever since I was cut off from the reed,

Men and women, to my sad song pay heed.

A breast riddled with sorrow do I want,

So I can deeply of my sad love chant.

He that is cut off from his roots and torn away

Will yearn to return to that home someday.

In every gathering have I sung my pain.

To every one, good and bad, I was a friend.

Each one befriends me for his own whims,

But none delves deeper to the secret within.

My secret to my song is very near,

But none has the capacity to see or hear.

My being is not so distant from my soul.

They only see a part, but do not see the whole.

It's a fire that is in my music singing.

He who has not this fire is but hardly living.'

It is the fire of Love that the flute has caught.

It is the passion of Love that wine has got.

The flute is a friend to all who are forlorn.

The strains of its song have my heartstrings undone.

Has anyone seen a poison or an antidote like this?

Has anyone seen a lover or a friend like this?

The flute tells the tale of an arduous way,

It speaks of the love of *Majnun*, I say.

BREAK YOUR CHAINS, O SON

Break your chains, O son, and free yourself;

How long will you yearn for silver and gold?

Were you to catch, in a cup, a sea,

How much will a day's portion be?

The cup of greed is never full, greedy of intent.

The oyster never makes a pearl unless content.

He whose robe is torn because of Love,

He is free of all fault and he is pure.

Glory be to Love, my mad, mad Love!

O you, who are the cure of all my ills!

O you, the cure of my ambition and my pride!

O you, my Plato and my spirit's guide!

The earthly body reached the skies;

The mountain danced and became wise.

Love became the soul of Mount Sinai;

Sinai reeled and Moses fell in a swoon.

A mystery in these ups and downs resides;

Were it revealed, the Universes would collide.

He who is separated from a true friend

Is lost, no matter if he has many friends!

If the rose is gone and the garden lost in rain,

You will not hear the nightingale again.

The universe is the Beloved, the lover veiled;

The Beloved is alive, the lover is dead.

He whom Love has passed by

Is a wingless bird, unable to fly.

What can I say? I cannot tell left from right

Without my friend and his guiding Light!

The sickness of Love is from other illnesses apart;

Love is the barometer of God's mystery in our hearts.

Love, whether it be of this world or the other,

Leads us to the Lord who is the Lord of all!

However must I describe Love's qualities?

When I am in it, my words aren't adequate.

The tongue can throw some light on it,

But Love is most illumined by silence.

When the pen was busy writing it was fluent;

When it reached the word of Love, it broke down.

When it wanted to explain this word,

It broke in two and the paper tore to shreds!

Reason like a donkey stuck in mud became;

Only Love and Loving could give Love a name.

The rising Sun best describes the Sun;

The Sun gives life and light to our souls.

The Shadow makes you sleep like a baby,

But when the Sun appears, the Moon is in shade.

There is no traveller like the Sun;

The Sun of the soul is yet to shine!

Though the Sun is outwardly unique,

Even then, one can imagine another like it.

But that Sun which has the world enraptured,

There is no imagined equal of that Sun!

Imagination is paltry indeed to conceive of such

A Sun as he is beyond imagination and intellect.

Shams-e-Tabrizi, who is light, perfect and complete,

He is indeed the Sun and the light of Truth.

When we reached the mention of *Shamsuddin*

The Sun of the fourth heaven hid his face...

I'M DRUNK

I'm drunk with the wine of the Wine-maker;

My body drunk with the Beloved!

I am not the only one who's drunk, what's more

This wine has intoxicated many others before!

When I passed the tavern I could see

The wine-maker, the judge, the sermonizer – drunk!

This pure wine has been tasted by the pure in spirit

Junaid and *Shibli*¹ and *Attar*² were drunk with it!

This is the wine that *Mansur*³ drank

And with the words of Truth got drunk!

With the spirit of *Shamsuddin Tabriz*,

I, too, dance in the bazaar, drunk!

THROUGH LOVE

Through Love, bitterness becomes sweet.

Through Love, bronze turns into gold.

Through Love, dregs turn to tasteful wine.

Through Love, pain turns into a balm.

Through Love, the thorns become the rose.

Through Love, vinegar turns to wine.

Through Love, the cross becomes a throne.

Through Love, the burden becomes a fortune.

Through Love, the prison becomes a garden.

Through Love, the garden becomes an oven.

Through Love, the fire turns to light.

Through Love, the demon becomes a fairy.

Through Love, the stone becomes butter.

Without Love, wax turns into steel.

Through Love, sorrow becomes happiness.

Through Love, the follower becomes the leader.

Through Love, the sting becomes honey.

Through Love, the lion becomes a mouse.

Through Love, illness becomes health.

Through Love, a curse becomes a blessing.

Through Love, the thorn becomes a needle.

Through Love, the home is lit up.

Through Love, the dead man becomes alive.

Through Love, the king becomes a slave.

IT IS THE TRUE BELOVED WHO CAUSES ALL OUTWARD EARTHLY BEAUTY TO EXIST

The Lover's love is apparent, his Beloved hidden.

The Friend is absent, his signs are everywhere.

Leave this desire for outward forms.

Love should go beyond form and face.

The one you love is not mere form,

Whether it be of heavenly or earthly kind.

Whatever the form that is the object of your love,

You do not forsake it because life leaves it!

The form is still there. Why the disgust at it?

Lover, realize what your true Beloved is.

And since love increases fidelity

How can you fail when form abides beyond the apparent?

When the Sun shines on a wall

The wall is lit up, but by the Sun's borrowed light.

O ignorant one! Love not the brick or stone.

Seek out the source that lights it up!

HE WHO NEEDS MERCY FINDS IT

Doing kindness is the game and quarry of good men,

A good man seeks in the world only pains to cure.

Wherever there is a pain there goes the remedy,

Wherever there is poverty there goes relief.

Seek not water, only show you are thirsty,

That water may spring up all around you.

That you may hear the words, 'The Lord gives them to drink,'¹

Be athirst! Allah knows what is best for you.

Seek you the water of mercy? Be downcast,

And straightway drink the wine of mercy to intoxication.

Mercy is called down by mercy to the last.

Withhold not, then, mercy from any one, O son!

... If of yourself you cannot journey to the Kaaba,

Represent your helplessness to the Reliever.

Cries and groans are a powerful means,

And the All-merciful is a mighty nurse.

The nurse and the mother keep excusing themselves,

Till their child begins to cry.

In you too has God created infant needs;

When they cry out, their milk is brought to them;

God said, 'Call on God';² continue crying,

So that the milk of His love may boil up.

E. H. Whinfield

ALL FALSE DOCTRINES CONTAIN AN ELEMENT OF TRUTH

... Say not, then, that all these creeds are false,

The false ones ensnare hearts by the scent of truth.

Say not that they are all erroneous fancies,

There is no fancy in the universe without some truth.

Truth is the 'night of power' hidden amongst other nights,

In order to try the spirit of every night.

Not every night is that of power, O youth,

Nor yet is every night quite void of power.

In the crowd of rag-wearers there is but one Faqir;¹

Search well and find out that true one.

Tell the wary and discerning believer

To distinguish the king from the beggar.

If there were no bad goods in the world,

Every fool might be a skilful merchant;

For then the hard art of judging goods would be easy.

If there were no faults, one man could judge as well as another.

Again, if all were faulty, skill would be profitless.

If all wood were common, there would be no aloes.

He who accepts everything as true is a fool,

But he who says all is false is a knave.

THE EYE OF OUTWARD SENSE

The eye of outward sense is as the palm of a hand,
The whole of the object is not grasped in the palm.
The sea itself is one thing, the foam another;
Neglect the foam, and regard the sea with your eyes.
Waves of foam rise from the sea night and day,
You look at the foam ripples and not the mighty sea.
We, like boats, are tossed hither and thither,
We are blind though we are on the bright ocean.
Ah! you who are asleep in the boat of the body,
You see the water; behold the Water of waters!
Under the water you see there is another Water moving it,
Within the spirit is a Spirit that calls it.
Where were Moses and Jesus when that Sun
Showered down water on the fields sown with corn?
Where were Adam and Eve what time
God Almighty fitted the string to His bow?
The one form of speech is evil and defective;
The other form, which is not defective, is perfect.
If I speak thereof your feet stumble,
Yet if I speak not of it, woe be to you!

And if I speak in terms of outward form,

You stick fast in that same form, O son.

You are foot-bound like the grass in the ground,

And your head is shaken by the wind uncertainly.

Your foot stands not firmly till you move it,

Nay, till you pluck it not up from the mire.

When you pluck up your foot you escape from the mire,

The way to this salvation is very difficult.

When you obtain salvation at God's hands, O wanderer,

You are free from the mire, and go your way.

When the suckling is weaned from its nurse,

It eats strong meats and leaves the nurse.

You are bound to the bosom of earth like seeds,

Strive to be weaned through nutriment of the heart.

Eat the words of wisdom, for veiled light

Is not accepted in preference to unveiled light.

When you have accepted the light, O Beloved,

When you behold what is veiled without a veil,

Like a star you will walk upon the heavens;

Nay, though not in heaven, you will walk on high.

...

Keep silence, that you may hear Him speaking

Words unutterable by tongue in speech.

Keep silence, that you may hear from that Sun

Things inexpressible in books and discourses.

Keep silence, that the Spirit may speak to you...

E. H. Whinfield

ALL RELIGIONS ARE IN SUBSTANCE ONE AND THE SAME

In the prayers and adorations of righteous men

Praises of all prophets are together bound.

All their praises mingle into a single stream,

As the water from several cups poured in a jug.

Because the praised is none but the One,

All religions by this token are the same.

Remember, all praise is directed to God's light

And the various worshipped forms are from this light.

Men do not praise that which is not worthy,

They only err in mistaking another for Him.

Just as when moonlight falls on a wall,

The wall is merely a link to reflect its beams;

Yet when it reflects back to its source, it seems

They forget the Moon and worship the wall.

Or when a Moon is reflected in a well,

They look into the well and praise the image;

In truth they are praising the Moon,

But mistakenly only praising its reflection.

The object of their praise is the Moon, not its guises,

But when this does happen, infidelity arises.

The well-meaning person, in this way, goes astray,

The Moon is in the heavens, but he only sees it in the well.

Because of such idols, mankind is confused,

And driven by vain desires, they reap sorrow!

THE PROPHET'S PRAYER FOR THE ENVIOUS PEOPLE

O Giver of stability and sustenance,

Set free mankind from uncertainty and doubt.

In work which is worthy of performance,

Let them be steadfast and certain.

Give them patience and weigh down their scales

And set them free from vile deceivers all.

O Merciful One, save them from envy

So they do not become like envious *Iblis*.

How foolish man is envious over all these passing

Things: wealth, comforts, bodies that will die!

See how kings full of envy battle,

And kill their kith and kin!

How lovers full of desire for false forms

Spill each other's blood in vain!

KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEART

The knowledge of people of the heart

Carries them high;

The knowledge of worshippers of the flesh

Is like a burden on them.

When knowledge tempers the heart,

It is a helper.

When knowledge caters to the flesh,

It becomes a destroyer.

God has said 'as an ass bearing a load of books'¹

Is he whose knowledge has not come from Him.

Beware! Carry not this burden

To satisfy the flesh, instead gain true knowledge.

Mount the steed of true knowledge

And let this burden of false knowledge fall from you.

Unless you drink from this cup of Godly love

You will not be free from lust,

Which will weigh you down.

IRAQI

(d. AD 1289; AH 687)

Iraqi was the pen-name of the Persian poet Fakhruddin Ibrahim of Hamadan, an ancient city in Iran. His writings are almost entirely of a mystical and sometimes erotic nature.

Iraqi is said to have fallen in love and joined a band of Qalandars. He followed them to India, where he became a disciple of the famous Sufi saint Bahauddin Zakariya (1170–1267) of Multan. Eventually, Iraqi left Multan after the other dervishes complained that instead of meditating in silence he was singing a ghazal he had composed. He travelled to Asia Minor and became an influential follower of Mohyuddin Ibn ‘Arabi, his best-known work, *Lama’at (Divine Flashes)*, being a commentary on Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fusus al-Hikam*.

Iraqi died in Syria and was buried in Damascus alongside the tomb of Mohyuddin Ibn ‘Arabi, whose influence in Persia was partly due to Iraqi’s efforts.

THE WINE

The wine wherewith the cup they first filled high

Was borrowed from the Saqi's languorous eye.

Since self-possessed the revellers they found

The draught of selflessness they handed round.

The loved one's wine-red lips supplied the cup:

They named it 'Lover's wine', and drank it up.

No rest the hair of those fair idols knows,

So many a heart it robs of its repose.

For good and bad a place within our hall

They found, and with one cup confounded all.

They cast the ball of Beauty on the field,

And at one charge compelled both worlds to yield.

The drunken revellers from eye and lip

The almond gather, and the sugar sip.

But that sweet lip, desired of all, most fair,

Maketh harsh words the helpless lover's share.

They loosen and set free their locks of jet

That they therewith for hearts a snare may set.

A hundred messages their glances dart;

Their eyebrows signal secrets to the heart.

They speak in confidence and silence claim,

And then their secrets to the world proclaim.

Where'er in all the world is grief and gall

They mix them up, the mixture 'Love' they call.

Why should they seek to hurt *Iraqi's* fame,

Since they themselves their secrets thus proclaim?

E. G. Browne

MAKE ME HAPPY

Make me happy, my Love, for I am sad.

Have pity on my heart, for I am wretched!

Show your face so I can marvel at it,

For that is what I yearn for in this world!

Without your face my Belief is Unbelief.

With your presence my Unbelief is Belief!

My heart is sad without union with you.

Make me happy as without you I am sad.

WHEN I KISSED THE EARTH

When I kissed the earth in supplication

A cry came forth from the earth:

You have stained my face

With this supplication of lies!

O unfortunate I that did not have the fate

Of your enemy's life,

As your friend I bow my head

To feel the blow of your knife!

When I visited the gambling den

I saw kind and truthful men.

When I visited the mosque and temple

I got nothing but deceit!

SA'DI SHIRAZI

(AD C. 1184–1291; AH 579–689)

Mushariffudin bin Muslihuddin Abdullah is more popularly known as Sheikh Sa'di or Sa'di Shirazi. According to a famous rhyme often quoted by lovers of Persian literature, Sa'di ranks with Anwari and Firdausi as one of the three 'Prophets of Poetry'. He is undoubtedly one of the most popular poets of Persian literature and enjoys a reputation unmatched by any other Persian writer, not only in Iran but wherever Persian is spoken or cultivated.

Born around 1184, Sa'di was orphaned at an early age and was sent to Baghdad to study at the famous Nizamiyya College. It was here that he came under the influence of the famous Sufi Sheikh Shihabuddin Suharwardi (d. 1234). Sa'di's stay in Baghdad lasted until 1226. For the next thirty years he travelled extensively in Islamic lands, including Syria, India, the Hejaz and Central Asian countries, finally returning to Shiraz in 1256 and settling there.

In 1257/8 he composed his most famous books, the *Bustan (The Orchard)* and *Gulistan (The Rose Garden)*. For more than eight centuries since their composition, they have been the first classics that a student of Persian studies, while Sa'di's ghazals are loved by all who value Persian poetry. Sa'di wrote in a variety of poetic styles and forms, as well as prose. He is buried in Shiraz.

COUPLET

It's best that man

To God proclaims

His errors and shortcomings,

For no man has the capacity

To count His countless blessings.

THE THRONE OF THE HEART

I sit on the throne of the heart;

That is the style of my poverty!

I am dust on my Beloved's path;

That is my elevated state!

No need to visit the mosque for me;

Your eyebrow is a prayer arch for me.

Sa'di, why this pilgrim's garb?

Why, indeed, this ritual of hajj?

Look at my Beloved's face;

That is the true worshipper's place!

IN LOVE

In Love there are no days or nights,

For lovers it is all the same.

The musicians have gone, yet the Sufis listen;

In Love there is a beginning but no end.

Each has a name for his Beloved,

But for me my Beloved is nameless.

Sa'di, if you destroy an idol,

Then destroy the idol of the Self.

IN THE COMPANY OF THE WINE-MAKER

In the company of the Wine-maker

Happy Sufis did I see, lost and drunk.

Lovers truthful,

With the promise of the Beloved drunk,

The Lover is drunk, the Beloved drunk;

In their own secret they are drunk.

The Guide is drunk, the Leader is drunk;

With this mystery the Sheikh is drunk.

The puritan I saw in the tavern drunk;

The garden, the people, the bazaar, all drunk.

Each I saw is unrestrained, oblivious;

The crow, the flowers, drunk,

The garden and the bowers, drunk.

The king is drunk with wealth, the poor

With poverty,

The beautiful with their beauty,

And the Lovers with the hope of union, drunk.

MAHMUD SHABISTARI

(d. AD 1320; AH 719)

Little is known about the life of Mahmud Shabistari, including his exact date of birth. What we know is that he was born and educated in the village of Shabistar near Tabriz in Iran.

He was not a voluminous writer, but his only extant literary masterpiece, *Gulshan-e-Raz* (*Rose Garden of Mystery*) – written in 1311 and containing about a thousand rhymed couplets – is considered an essential manual of the mystical doctrine of Sufism, making Shabistari one of the most celebrated Sufi poets of the fourteenth century.

The poem, composed in masnawi form, was written in response to a series of questions on mystical doctrine, and the influence of Mohyuddin Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Wahdatul Wujud* (Unity of Being) philosophy is evident. It is one of the best manuals of Sufi theosophy which exists. His lesser-known works are *Haqqul-Yaqin* (*Certain Truth*) and *Risala-i-Shahid* (*Tract of the Witness*). The *Gulshan-e-Raz* is studied widely in the Islamic world.

WHAT AM I?

Again you question me, saying, 'What am I?'

Inform me as to what 'I' means.

When Absolute Being is spoken of

Men use the word 'I' to say it.

When 'The Truth' is set in what exists

You express it by the word 'I',

'I' and 'you' are the accidents of Being.

They are like lattices of the lamp of Being.

Bodies and spirits are all the One Light,

Now shining from mirrors, now from lamps.

You say, 'The word "I" in every connection.'

You really speak of the soul of 'I'.

But as you have made intellect your guide,

You do not know your 'Self' from one of your parts.

Go, O master, and know well your 'Self',

For fatness does not resemble an empty tumour.

'I' and 'you' are higher than body and soul,

For both body and soul are parts of 'me'.

The word 'I' is not limited to man,

So that you should say it means only the soul.

Lift yourself above time and space,

Quit the world and be yourself a world for yourself.

SECRET OF UNITY

That man attains to the secret of unity

Who is not detained at the stages on the road.

But the knower is he that knows Very Being,

He that witnesses Absolute Being.

He recognizes no being but Very Being,

And being such as his own he gambles clean away.

Your being is naught but thorns and weeds,

Cast it all clean away from you.

Go sweep out the chamber of your heart,

Make it ready to be the dwelling-place of the Beloved.

When you depart out, He will enter in,

In you, void of yourself, will He display His beauty.

The man who is loved for his 'pious works',

Whom the pains of 'negation' purify as a room that is swept,

He finds an abode in a 'laudable station',

He finds a portion in 'what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard'.

But while the stain of his own being remains on him,

The knowledge of the knower assumes not the form of experience.

Until you cast away obstacles from before you,

The light enters not the chamber of your heart.

As there are four obstacles in this world,
So also the modes of purification from them are four:
First, purification from filthiness of the flesh;
Second, from sin and evil 'whispers of the tempter';¹
The third is the purification from bad habits,
Which make men as beasts of the field;
The fourth is the purification of the secret,
For at this point the pilgrim's journeyings cease.
Whoso is cleansed with these purifications,
Verily he is fit to commune with God.
Until you utterly gamble away yourself,
How can your prayer be true prayer?
When your essence is pure from all stain,
Then it is that your prayers are 'a joy of the eyes',²
There remains then no distinction;
Knower and known are one and the same.

E. H. Whinfield

KNOWER AND KNOWN

Set a mirror over against you,

Look on it and see that other person.

Again see what that reflection is,

It is not this nor that, what then is that reflection?

Since I am limited to my own proper Self,

I know not what is this shadow of me;

In fine, how can Not-being be joined with being?

The two, light and darkness, cannot be united.

Like the past, the future month and year exist not,

What is there but this one point of the present?

Time is one imaginary point, and that ever passing away,

You have named it the fleeting river.

There is none other in this desert, but only I,

Tell me what is this echo and noise?

Accidents are fleeting, substance is compounded of them.

Say how does it exist or where is this compound?

Bodies exist only through length, breadth and depth,

Since their existence proceeds from these nonentities.

And of this kind is all the fabric of the two worlds;

Now you know this, have faith and be established.

Of a truth there is no other existence than 'The Truth',

Whether you say 'He is the Truth', or 'I am the Truth.'

Separate imaginary appearances from True Being,

Make not yourself a stranger but a friend.

E. H. Whinfield

UNITY, TRAVEL AND JOURNEY

Union with 'The Truth' is separation from the creature state,

Friendship with Him is estrangement from Self.

When the contingent wipes off the dust of contingency,

Nothing remains save Necessary Being.

The existence of the two worlds is as a dream,

In the moment of eternity they become naught.

He who is 'united' is not a creature,

The perfect man says not so.

How shall Not-being find entrance at that door?

What connection has the dust with the Lord of Lords?

How can Not-being be united with 'The Truth'?

How can Not-being achieve travelling and journey?

If your soul were cognizant of this mystery,

You would straightway say, 'God pardon my error.'

You are non-existent, and Not-being is ever immovable,

How can this non-existent contingent move to the necessary?

No substance possesses objectivity without accidents,

And what is an accident? – what 'endures not two moments'.

Philosophers, who have written on natural science,

Define bodies by length, breadth and depth.

What then is matter but an absolute nonentity?

Wherein is demonstrated form?

As then form without matter is not self-existent,

So too matter without a form is naught but Not-being.

All the bodies in the universe consist of these two nonentities,

Whereof nothing is known, but their non-existence.

Consider then their whole essence without more or less,

In itself it is neither existent nor non-existent.

Look upon contingent being in spirit and in truth,

For apart from necessary being it is naught.

Absolute Being by its own perfection is pervading all,

Phenomenal objects are mere imaginary things;

Imaginary things are not really existent,

Though the numbers are many, only One is counted.

The world has only a simulated existence,

Its state is but an insubstantial pageant and a farce.

E. H. Whinfield

OF MODES OF BEING

Unity is like a sea, albeit a sea of blood,
Whereout rise thousands of mad waves.
Behold how this drop of water from that sea,
Has assumed so many names and forms!
Mist, cloud, rain, dew, clay,
Plant and animal, and perfect man.
In fine it was one drop of water at the first,
Wherefrom all these things were fashioned.
This universe of reason, soul, heavens and bodies,
Is as a drop of water in its beginning and ending.
When their appointed time comes to heaven and stars,
Their being is lost in Not-being.
When a wave strikes it, the world vanishes away,
Then is fulfilled the text: 'It abounded not yesterday.'¹
In a moment this world passes away,
None remains in the house save 'The Truth'.
At that moment you attain proximity,
You stripped of 'Self' are 'united' to 'The Beloved'.
Union here means the cessation of this dream,
When this dream passes away, it is union.

Say not 'the contingent outsteps its limits',

Contingent becomes not necessary, nor necessary contingent.

He who is transcendent in spiritual mysteries,

Says not this, for it is an inversion of verities.

O master! you have a thousand 'processes' before you,

Go and consider your own coming and going.

Of the argument of part and whole and the 'process' of man,

I tell you every whit both manifest and secret.

E. H. Whinfield

BEING IS THE SEA

Being is the sea, speech is the shore,
The shells are letters, the pearls knowledge of the heart.
In every wave it casts up a thousand royal pearls
Of traditions and holy sayings and texts.
Every moment a thousand waves rise out of it,
Yet it never becomes less by one drop.
Knowledge has its being from that sea,
The coverings of its pearls are voice and letters.
Since mysteries are here shown in an allegory,
It is necessary to have recourse to illustrations:
I have heard that in the month *Nisan*
The pearl oysters rise to the surface of the sea of Uman.
From the lowest depths of the sea they come up
And rest on the surface with opened mouths.
The mist is lifted up from the sea,
And descends in rain at the command of 'The Truth'.
There fall some drops into each shell's mouth,
And each mouth is shut as by a hundred bonds.
Then each shell descends into the depths with full heart,
And each drop of rain becomes a pearl.

The diver goes down to the depths of the sea,

And thence brings up the glittering pearls.

The shore is your body, the sea is Being,

The mist Grace, the rain knowledge of the Names.

The diver of this mighty sea is human reason,

Who holds a hundred pearls wrapped in his cloth.

The heart is to knowledge as a vessel,

The shells of knowledge of the heart are voice and letters...

E. H. Whinfield

KNOWLEDGE AND VIRTUE

Knowledge is never coupled with lust of the world,
If you desire the angel, cast out the dog.
Knowledge of faith springs from angelic virtues,
It enters not a heart with a dog's nature.
Thus runs the saying of 'The Chosen',
Mark it well, for verily it is so.
When form is contained in the house,
The angels enter it not perforce.
Go, cleanse the face of the tablets of your heart,
That an angel may make his abode with you.
Gain from him the knowledge that is your heritage,
Begin to till your field for the next world's harvest.
Read the books of 'The Truth' – your soul and the heavens,
Be adorned with the principle of all the virtues.

E. H. Whinfield

ON VIRTUES AND GOOD DISPOSITIONS

The principles of a good character are equity,

And thereafter wisdom, temperance, courage.

He who is endued with all these four

Is a sage perfect in thought and deed.

His soul and heart are well informed with wisdom,

He is neither over-cunning nor a fool.

By temperance his appetites are subdued,

Intemperance and insensibility alike are banished.

The courageous man is pure from abjectness and from boasting,

His nature is exempt from cowardice and rashness.

Equity is as the garment of his nature,

He is void of injustice, thus his character is good.

All the virtues lie in the mean,

Which is alike removed from excess and defect.

The mean is as the 'narrow way',

On either side yawns hell's bottomless pit...

E. H. Whinfield

BEAUTY

The world is the dowry given to man by the Universal Soul.

Of this marriage the issue is eloquence,

Knowledge, language, virtue, earthly beauty.

Heavenly beauty descends from the unseen world,

Descends like some licentious reveller,

Sets up its flag in the strong city of earthly beauty,

Throws into confusion all the world's array.

Now riding royally on the steed of comeliness,

Now brandishing the keen sword-blade of language.

When beheld in a person it is called beauty,

And when heard in speech eloquence.

Saints, kings, dervishes, apostles,

All alike bow down and own its sway.

What is this charm in the beauty of a fair face?

It is not merely earthly beauty, say what is it?

That heart ravishment can come only from 'The Truth',

For there is no partner in Divine agency.

How can it be lust which ravishes men's hearts?

For 'The Truth' now and again appears as evil.

Confess the 'working' of 'The Truth' in every place,

Set not foot beyond your own limits.

Know 'The Truth' in the garb of good is the true faith,

'The Truth' in the garb of evil is the work of Satan.

E. H. Whinfield

OF THE EYE AND THE LIP

From His eye proceed languishing and intoxication.

From His ruby lip the essence of being.

Because of His eye all hearts are burning,

His ruby lip is healing to the sick heart.

Because of His eye hearts are drunken and aching,

By His ruby lip all souls are clothed.

Though the world is not regarded by His eye,

His lip ever and anon shows compassion.

Sometimes with humanity He charms our hearts,

Sometimes He grants help to the helpless.

By smiles He gives life to man's water and clay,

By a breath He kindles the heaven into a flame.

Every glance of His eye is a snare baited with corn,

Every corner thereof is a wine shop.

With a frown He lays waste the creature world,

With one kiss He restores it again every moment.

Because of His eye our blood is ever boiling,

Because of His lip our souls are ever beside themselves.

By a frown of His eye He plunders the heart,

By a smile on His lips He cheers the soul.

When you ask of His eye and lip an embrace,
One says 'nay', and the other 'yea'.
By a frown He finishes the affair of the world,
By a kiss He ever and anon revives the soul.
One frown from Him and we yield up our lives,
One kiss from Him and we rise again.
As the 'twinkling of an eye' comes the last day,¹
By a breath the spirit of Adam was created.
When the world reflects on His eye and His lip,
It gives itself up to the worship of wine.
All existence is not regarded by His eyes,
They regard it only as the illusion of a dream.
Man's existence is but intoxication or a sleep,
What relation does the dust bear to the Lord of Lords?
Reason draws a hundred perplexities from this
That He said, "Thou mightest be formed after mine eye"²...

E. H. Whinfield

*Of the Mole*¹

... If this heart of mine be the reflection of that mole,

Why are its states so various?

Sometimes it is sick like His intoxicating eye,

Sometimes fluttering like His curl.

Sometimes gleaming as a Moon like that face,

Sometimes dark like that black mole.

Sometimes it is a mosque, sometimes a synagogue,

Sometimes a hell, sometimes a heaven.

Sometimes exalted above the seventh heaven,

Sometimes sunken below 'this mound' of earth.

After devotion and asceticism it becomes again

Addicted to wine, lamp and beauty.

E. H. Whinfield

WINE AND BEAUTY

Wine, torch, and beauty are epiphanies of Verity,
For it is that which is revealed under all forms soever.
Wine and torch are the transport and light of 'The Knower',
Behold 'The Beauty' for it is hidden from none.
Here wine is the lampshade, torch the lamp,
And Beauty the beam of the light of spirits.
By Beauty were kindled sparks in the heart of Moses,
His wine was the fire and his torch the burning bush.
Wine and torch are the soul of that flashing light,
Beauty signifies that 'greatest of signs'.¹
Wine, torch, and beauty, all are present,
Neglect not to embrace that Beauty.
Quaff the wine of dying to Self, and for a season
Peradventure you will be freed from the dominion of Self.
Drink wine that it may set you free from yourself,
And may conduct the being of the drop to the ocean.
Drink wine, for its cup is the face of 'The Friend',
The cup is His eye drunken and flown with wine.
Seek wine without cup or goblet,
Wine is wine-drinker, cup-bearer is wine cup.

Drink wine from the cup of 'the face that endures',²

The text 'their Lord gave them to drink' is its cup-bearer.³

Pure wine is that which gives you purification

From the stain of existence at the time of intoxication.

Drink wine and rid yourself of coldness of heart,

For a drunkard is better than the self-righteous.

The man who dwells far from the portals of 'The Truth',

For him the veil of darkness is better than the veil of light.

Thus Adam found a hundred blessings from darkness,

And *Iblis* was eternally cursed through the light.

Though the mirror of the heart be polished,

What profit is it when only Self is seen on its face?

When a ray from His face falls upon the wine,

Many forms are seen on it as it were bubbles.

World and spirit world are seen on it as bubbles,

Its bubbles are to the saints as veils.

Universal Reason is dazed and beside itself at this,

Universal Soul is reduced to slavery.

The whole universe is as His wine house,

The heart of every atom as His wine cup.

Reason is drunken, angels drunken, soul drunken,

Air drunken, earth drunken, heaven drunken.

The heavens giddy with this wine are reeling to and fro,

Desiring in their heart to smell its perfume.

The angels drinking it pure from pure vessels,

Pour the dregs of their draught upon this world.

The elements becoming light-headed from that draught

Fall now into the fire, now into the water.

From the scent of its dregs which fell on the earth

Man ascends up till he reaches heaven.

From its reflection the withered body becomes a living soul,

From its heat the frozen soul is warmed to life and motion.

The creature world is ever dizzy therewith,

From house and home ever wandering astray.

One from the scent of its dregs becomes a philosopher,

One from seeing the colour of the pure wine a traditionist.

One from half a draught becomes righteous,

One from quaffing a cupful becomes a lover.

Yet another swallows at one draught

Cup, wine house, cup-bearer and wine-drinker.

He swallows them all, yet his mouth remains open.

Well done, O ocean heart, O mighty winebibber!

He drinks up existence at one draught,

And obtains release from affirmations and negations.

Freed from dry devotions and empty rites,

He grasps the skirt of the ancient of the wine house.

E. H. Whinfield

OF TAVERN-HAUNTERS

To be a haunter of taverns is to be freed from Self;
Self-regard is paganism, even if it be in righteousness.
They have brought you news from the tavern
That unification is shaking off relations.
The tavern is of the world that has no similitude,
It is the place of lovers that reck not.
The tavern is the nest of the bird of the soul,
The tavern is the sanctuary that has no place.
The tavern-haunter is desolate in a desolate place,
In his desert the world is as a mirage.
This desert has no end or limit,
No man has seen its beginning or its end.
Though you wander about in it for a hundred years,
You will find there neither yourself, nor 'other'.
They that dwell therein are headless and footless,
They are neither faithful nor infidels.
The wine of alienation from Self has got into their heads,
They have renounced alike evil and good.
Each has drunk wine without lips or palate,
Each has cast away thought of name and fame,

Talk of marvels, of visions, and 'states',

Dreams of secret chambers, of lights, of signs.

All through the smell of these dregs have they cast away,

Through tasting this self-annihilator they are lying drunken.

Pilgrim's staff and cruse, and rosary, and dentifrice,

All have they given as ransom for these dregs.

Falling and rising again in the midst of water and clay,

Shedding blood from their eyes for tears.

Now raised by intoxication to the world of bliss,

Exalting their necks as racers.

Now with blackened faces beholding the wall,

Now with reddened faces impaled on the stake.

Now in the mystic dance of joy in the Beloved,

Losing head and foot like the revolving heavens.

In every strain which they hear from the minstrel

Comes to them rapture from the unseen world.

The mystic song is not those mere words and sound,

For in every note thereof lies a precious mystery.

Putting from off their head their tenfold cloak,

Being abstracted from every colour and smell;

And washing off in that pure, well-racked wine,

All colour, black and green and blue.

Drinking one cup of that pure wine,

And thence becoming 'Sufis' cleansed from qualities;

Sweeping the dust of dung-heaps from off their souls,

Telling not a hundredth part of what they see,

Grasping the skirts of drunkards flown with wine,

Wearied of teachership and discipleship...

E. H. Whinfield

IDOLS

Here idol is the evidence of love and unity,

Girdle is the binding of the bond of obedience.

Since infidelity and faith are both based on Being,

Idol-worship is essentially Unification.

Since all things are the manifestations of Being,

One amongst them must be an idol.

Consider well, O wise man,

An idol as regards its real being is not vain.

Know that God Most High created it,

And whatever comes from the Good is good.

Being is purely good in whatever it be,

If it also contains evil, that proceeds from 'other'.

If the Mussulman but knew what is faith,

He would see that faith is idol-worship.

If the polytheist only knew what idols are,

How would he be wrong in his religion?

He sees in idols naught but the visible creature,

And that is the reason that he is legally a heathen.

You also, if you see not 'The Truth' hid in the idols,

In the eye of the law are not a Mussulman.

By telling beads and saying prayers and reading the Qur'an

The heathen becomes not a Mussulman.

That man is disgusted with superficial faith,

To whom the true infidelity has once been revealed.

Within every body is hidden a soul,

And within infidelity is hidden true faith.

Infidelity is ever giving praise to 'The Truth';

The text, 'All things praise God',¹ proves it.

Who can gainsay it? What am I saying? I have gone astray from the road?

'Leave them, and after all that is revealed, say, God,'²

Who adorned the face of the idol with such beauty?

Who became an idol-worshipper, unless 'The Truth' willed it?

It is He that made, He that said, He that is,

Made good, said good, is good.

See but One, say One, know but One,

In this are summed up the roots and branches of faith.

It is not I who declare this; hear it from the Qur'an,

'There is no distinction in the creatures of the Merciful.'³

E. H. Whinfield

SULTAN VELED

(*AD 1226–1312; AH 622–711*)

Baha al-Din Muhammad-i Walad – also known as Sultan Walad (Veled in Turkish) – was the eldest son of the great Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi and is regarded as the father of Turkish verse.

Although his most famous work, the mystical *Rabab-nama* (*The Book of the Guitar*), is mostly written in Persian, it also contains more than a hundred verses in Turkish, thought to be the earliest extant examples of Western Turkish poetry.

Sultan Veled kept alive the Mevlevi Order founded by Rumi (*Mevlana* or ‘Our Master’), gathering the followers of his father around him. He also erected a mausoleum to his father, which became a focal point for the order. Sultan Veled died in Konya aged 86 and is buried next to his father’s tomb.

TO MEVLANA

Wot ye well Mevlana is of saints the Pole;
Whatsoever thing he sayeth, do in whole.
All his words are mercies from the Heavenly King;
Such that blind folks' eyes were opened, did they sing.
Whosoever by this Word doth tread the Way –
God vouchsafe to me the meed for him, I pray.
Mine are neither flocks nor riches to bestow,
That the love of Him through riches I should show.
These the riches which the Lord hath granted me;
Who so longeth for such riches, wise is he!

E. J. W. Gibb

VALUE OF WORDS

Words, they form the riches of the man who's wise;

All his riches giveth he, these Words he buys.

Riches, they are dust; these Words are life for aye;

Therefore flee the wise from those, in these to stay.

Words abide enduring, wealth departing flies;

Seize the living thing and leave thou that which dies!

Hold by God, that so thou mayst abide for aye;

Beg thou guidance of the Lord both night and day.

Praying, say to Him a-weeping dolefully:

'Through Thy grace divine do Thou have ruth on me;

That I see Thee clearly, ope mine eyen wide;

That I drop-like fall midmost the sea, and bide.

E'en as when the drop into the sea doth run,

Two they rest not, drop and sea become but one.

So would I, e'en as that drop, become the sea;

Die not, but e'en like the sea, alive would be!

Mazed and wildered at these words the wise abide:

'How then hath the creature the Creator spied?'

'No man sees that Face,' 'tis thus I answer these,

'It is his own Self reflected that he sees.

God the Lord doth give to him of His own Light,

By that Light doth he the Lord God clearly sight.'

So far may the letters hold the Verities.

By these Words it is that soar aloft the wise,

Understanding how 'tis God that seeth God,

How it is the Light of God that seeketh God!

E. J. W. Gibb

LEAVE THY WISDOM

Leave thy wisdom, on this Path a madman be!

He who gives his soul, an hundred souls wins he.

Since the soul's from God, to Him the soul restore;

He shall give thee many and many a soul therefor.

Sow the soul where it an hundredfold shall bear;

He who sows not there his soul shall evil fare.

See, thy soul, when thou 'rt asleep, where doth it flee?

See too what it worketh there withouten thee.

From thy body, when thou sleep'st, the soul doth fleet

Bird-like, wheresoe'er it list, doth drink, doth eat;

Of itself a soul will myriad forms assume,

City, marketplace or shop will it become;

Of itself it will become the earth, the skies;

Wakeful is the soul, while there the body lies.

Know that thus will be thy soul when comes thy death.

When thou yieldest up thy soul heed well thy faith,

That the soul may bear this with it up to God,

And may walk with [houris](#) bright in Heaven's abode.

Happy yonder soul whose very soul is Love,

And whose service on this Path is naught but Truth!

Dead the loveless soul must needs be held, I say;
Needs must find one who a Lover is straightway,
That he make the soul in thee alive through Love;
Ay, that through his radiance flee this darkness off.
That he make thee, e'en as he is, true and leal;
That he pardon through his mercy all thine ill.
Seek thou eager in the world for such an one;
Hold him fast and sure, and let all else be gone.

E. J. W. Gibb

SEEK THOU GOD

Seek thou God from him who doth His message bear;

Deem not such is other than The Truth, beware!

Hold thou fast by him who hath found God alway;

Neither when thou'st found him cry, 'Where's God? I pray!'

Other is not God than he, ope thou thine eyes;

He it is who aye thy light to thee supplies.

Whoso seeth one as two is squint of eye;

Hearken not his speech, it is but trumpery.

Brother, whoso loves God from his heart, 'tis he

Who will understand these Words e'en as they be.

Heaven and earth before his sight are one alone,

All through God, without, within, One Secret shown!

One the speech, e'en though his words a myriad be;

From his speeches will an Eye come finally.

All that is will die, the soul alone will bide;

In yon world the Slave and Sultan, naught beside:

One are Slave and Sultan there, they are not tway;

In that Palace Prince and Slave are One for aye.

GHAZAL

Come, for God's sake, come unto me that thou mayest God conceive!

Give up the world e'en this very day that thou mayest God receive!

What were thy head? Give thou it up along with thy flocks on this Path!

Open thine eyes then, headless soul! That thou mayest God perceive!

Soar up to Heaven aloft, O my soul, if thou indeed be mine;

Open thy hand, give up thy wealth, that thou mayest God achieve!

E. J. W. Gibb

YUNUS EMRE

(*AD 1238–1321; AH 635–720*)

Yunus Emre is the most popular Sufi or mystic poet of Turkey. Though Sultan Veled is more revered as the father of Turkish mysticism and that nation's early poetry, it is Yunus who had the common touch and adopted the spoken idiom of his age. He is regarded as a folk hero and his diction follows that of many folk singers, poets and storytellers in Turkey and Central Asia.

Yunus Emre's poetry celebrates love and the common wisdom of Sufi saints and minstrels. At the same time his verses are infused with the *Wahdatul Wujud* (Unity of Being) ideas of Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi. The influence of Jalaluddin Rumi is also apparent in his poetry.

Yunus Emre's achievement lies in making Turkish the main discourse of Sufi poetry and ideas, and in breaking away from the over-formalized Turkish poetry composed in Persian. The main body of Yunus's works consists of a divan of more than 300 ghazals and 600 couplets in masnavi form. His popularity stretches to many countries in the Balkans and Central Asia.

HE WHO GOES WITH LOVE

He who goes with Love finds to the Truth the way;

Never shall he die, nay, he shall live for aye.

Whoso looks with Love into his dear one's face,

Wheresoe'er he look, behold, what meets his gaze!

Glory therefore in thy Love, O Lover true;

'Tis through Love that man hath passed this Kingdom, through.

Whosoe'er hath Love for wings, forth let him go!

Heav'n forbend that he should bide on earth below!

O my God! may we ne'er lose the Narrow Way,

Never let us from Thy Love depart or stray.

E. J. W. Gibb

THE MIGHTY ONE

That Mighty One of 'Be! and 'tis', that Lord of gracious sway am I.

That King who ere 'tis cut provides for each his bread each day am I.

The One who maketh man of seed, who maketh bird from egg proceed,

Who makes the Tongue of Power to speak, He who remembereth aye am I.

Who maketh some ascetics be, and some to work iniquity;

The Argument and Proof who veils their faults and flaws always am I.

Who unto one doth horses give, doth wives and wealth and children give,

The while another lacks a goat, that One of Gracious sway am I.

Who bringeth snow and doth earth freeze, who on each brute his food bestows,

Who worketh all these businesses, the Soul of souls in fay am I.

I am Eternity in sooth, that King, the Unconditioned Truth;

Tomorrow Khizr may water dole, who wipes his sins away am I.

Know ye what from Four Things proceed, behold, I am the Sign indeed;

That God who builded Fire and Air and Earth and Water, yea, am I.

Who holds the veils of flesh and skin and bone and life and body e'en;

My works are Power and many an one, the Hid and Open aye am I.

The Outer and the Inner I, the Former and the Latter I;

Yea, I am He, and He is I, He whom they praise alway am I.

No truchman may between Us be, all wroughten there is clear to me;

Who giveth me this tongue is He; yon Sea that rolls each way am I.

He who did earth and sky create, who maketh Throne and Stool rotate;

Thousand and one His Names, *Yunus*. He of the Qur'an, yea, am I.

E. J. W. Gibb

COME LET US BE COMRADES

Come and let us two be comrades, come and let us seek the Loved One;

Come and let us two be helpmates, come and let us seek the Loved One.

Come and guide me on our faring; to the Friend be our repairing;

Cast aside all dule and caring, come and let us seek the Loved One.

Let us quit the world together, cheated not, for it doth wither;

Let us two be parted never, come and let us seek the Loved One.

Soothly is the world unstable; ope thine eye, thy soul is sleeping;

Unto us be fere and comrade, come and let us seek the Loved One.

Ere the clutch of Fate impel us, ere the voice of Death do hail us,

Ere that *Azrail* assail us, come and let us seek the Loved One.

Let us see the loyal lover, tidings of the Truth to gather,

Let us find the lover *Yunus*, come and let us seek the Loved One.

E. J. W. Gibb

THOSE WHO HAVE MASTERED LIFE'S MEANING

Those who have mastered life's meaning shall know no pain;

The hearts that feel God's truth will never die in vain.

Flesh is mortal, not the soul; the dead can't return.

Only the body dies, souls can never be slain.

Hearts may take a hundred roads to find life's essence;

Unless one has God's grace one has nothing to gain.

Take care, don't break the loved one's heart, it's made of glass;

Once broken, you can't put it together again.

God created the world for the Prophet's friendship;

Those who come into this world go, they can't remain.

NOT A SOUL

Not a soul senses what we do,

Nor has an inkling about us;

We harbour no greed or hatred,

We disdain our selfhood as crass.

We don't scorn or vituperate –

Or laugh at anybody's state.

To scholars, we're not infidels

Nor do we crave the Christian cross.

We know what life is all about

What's there in the world to seek out?

For ourselves we desire nothing;

We roam the world to find its bliss.

Yunus declares: 'My Lord, listen,

I have my own supreme Sultan.'

In this world we desire neither

Gold and silver nor bronze and brass.

Talât S. Halman

I DRANK WINE FROM THE CUP-BEARER

I drank wine from the cup-bearer

At an inn higher than the sky.

Our souls are goblets in His hands,

Deep in His ecstasy we lie.

At our private place of meeting,

Where our hearts are scorched with yearning

Like moths, the Sun and the Moon ring

Our candle whose flames rise high.

Yunus, don't tell these words of trance

To those steeped in dark ignorance.

Can't you see how swiftly the chance

Of ignorant men's lives goes by?

Talât S. Halman

LET'S NOT REMAIN ADORING

Let's not remain adoring,

Come, let's go to the Friend, my soul.

Let's not die longing, imploring,

Come, let's go to the Friend, my soul.

Let's leave this city and this land;

Let's weep, shedding tears for the Friend,

With the cup of love's wine in hand;

Come, let's go to the Friend, my soul.

From this world we'd better be gone;

Why be duped, it couldn't live on.

Let's not be split while we are one;

Come, let's go to the Friend, my soul.

As I take the road, be my guide;

Let's set out for the Loved One's side.

Let's not look behind or ahead;

Come, let's go to the Friend, my soul.

Before the news of death arrives,

Before my marked soul vainly strives,

Before Gabriel routs our lives,

Come, let's go to the Friend, my soul.

Let's go to the truly sacred;

Let's ask for the news about God,

And taking *Yunus* on the road;

Come, let's go to the Friend, my soul.

Talât S. Halman

MY FLEETING LIFE

My fleeting life has come and gone –

A wind that blows and passes by.

I feel it has been all too brief,

Just like the blinking of an eye.

To this true word God will attest:

The Spirit is the Body's guest,

Some day it will vacate the breast

As birds, freed from their cages, fly.

Life, my good man, can be likened

To the land that the farmer sows:

Lying scattered all over the soil,

Some of the seeds sprout, but some die.

If you visit and give water

To a sick man who needs care,

With God's wine, he shall hail you there

One day when you soar to the sky.

Talât S. Halman

AMIR KHUSROW DEHLAVI

(AD 1253–1325; AH 650–725)

One of India's greatest Persian-language poets, Ab'ul Hasan Yamin al-Din Khusrow (better known as Amir Khusrow Dehlavi) was also a scholar and a musician, credited with being the father of qawwali music.

Among his numerous works – all composed under the patronage of the Muslim rulers of Delhi – are his *Khamsa-e-Nizami*, a group of five classical romances in emulation of the *Khamsa* of Nizami Ganjavi. He is also known for two historical poems, *Noh Sepehr* (*The Nine Heavens*) and the *Tughlaq Nama* (*Book of the Tughlaqs*), as well as his romances, such as *Masnavi Duval Rani-Khizr Khan* (*The Romance of Princess Duval and Prince Khizr*), and his *Kulliyat* of ghazals, which are sung in *sama* or qawwali gatherings.

Amir Khusrow remains an icon of Indo-Persian and Hindu-Muslim cultural synthesis, a great poet and musician who combined Persian with Indian indigenous forms.

I ASKED

I asked, 'What's bright as the Moon?'

'My beautiful face,' was the answer.

I said, 'What's sweet as sugar?'

'My speech,' was the answer.

'What is the way of Lovers?' I asked

'The way of loyalty,' was the answer.

I said, 'Don't be so cruel to me.'

'It's my job to behave thus,' was the answer.

'What is death for Lovers?'

'Separation from me,' was the answer.

'What is the cure for life's ills?'

'To gaze upon my face,' was the answer.

'What is spring, what autumn?'

'Only my changing beauty,' was the answer.

'Who is the envy of the gazelle?'

'My swift gait,' was the answer.

'Are you a fairy or a houri?'

'I am the Lord of Beauty,' was the answer.

'*Khusrow* is helpless,' I said.

'He is my devotee,' was the answer.

SO BE IT

My heart has lost all worldly care, so be it!

Hopelessness has wrecked my body, so be it!

Your dark tresses have wrought havoc on your lovers;

May your dark eyes grow ever more beguiling!

Your fresh and lovely face, may it grow more fresh,

And your heart of stone, may it grow harder for me.

O puritan, if you must pray for my salvation utter this:

This man astray in beauty's streets, may he go further astray!

All say that they have enough of your cruelty,

But I say may you grow more cruel to me!

My heart is in pieces from love's pain,

But if that makes her happy, may it break again!

O *Khusrow*, if you are in the habit of crying,

Then may it be that pure tears grace your eyes.

BETTER TO BE A BEGGAR THAN A KING

It's better to be a beggar than to be a king;

It's better to be a troublemaker than to be chaste!

To be a king is one big headache; for me,

I prefer to be a pauper free.

Friendship with a dog is preferable for man

Than with one who's arrogant and vain!

Union in love leaves no further desire!

For the Lover, separation fuels the fire!

O *Khusrow*, leave treacherous humanity.

Fall in love with God's mystery.

I AM A BELIEVER OF LOVE

I am a believer of Love.

No need of religion for me!

Each vein of mine throbs with devotion.

No need of the prayer beads for me!

Ignorant doctor, leave me to my fate

And try your medicine in some other place!

There is no cure for Lovers' ills

But the sight of the Beloved's face!

Do not my weeping eyes

To clouds compare;

They only rain water from the air:

I weep rivers of blood for my beauty fair!

Rejoice, O heart!

You will be to Beauty sacrificed

Though union is denied.

They say that *Khusrow*

Is an idol-worshipper.

It's true, their word,

I seek no truck with the common herd!

WE HAVE PASSED OUR LIVES IN SEARCH

We have passed our lives in search
Of the face of the Friend;
Who can find a moment's rest
Without seeing the face of the Friend?

It matters not if the whole world
In enmity turns away.

We will from our Beloved's door
Never turn away.

In the world, Kaaba is the place
Of worship that all Muslims know,
But for the Lovers the place of worship
Is the arch of the Beloved's eyebrows.

O Morning breeze, if you perchance
Should find where my Beloved dwells,
Search in her dark tresses
Our broken hearts entangled there.

O morning breeze,
I'll give my life to you

If you can bring

My Beloved's fragrance to me.

On Judgement Day

Each goes his own way,

But *Khusrow* knows none other

But the Beloved's way.

LAST NIGHT

I don't know what place it was

Where I found myself last night;

Everywhere they were dancing,

Love-stricken, where I was last night.

Fairy-faced, cypress-like in form, and rosy cheeked,

Irresistible beauty abounded, in that place,

Where I found myself, last night.

My rivals had her ear

And she was full of grace, and I afraid

To speak, but it was difficult to utter

A word, in the place I was last night.

O *Khusrow*, God himself held pride of place

And Muhammad was the light of Grace

In the gathering where I was

Last night!

MY HEART GAVE ME NO RESPITE

My heart gave me no respite,

I was like a madman last night.

All night I was beguiled,

Indulged and fantasized.

The flame of Love

In my heart burnt bright

And I was a moth

That on the flame alights.

The religious head for the mosque

Each day;

Worshipper of Love's idol,

I am heading the other way!

The heart, the body and the soul

By her thought was consumed whole;

The only one left untouched

Was I alone, and none to console.

In front of the Beloved

I did not mention *Khusrow's* faults;

Entranced by her beguiling beauty

I forgot my honest duty!

ASHIQ PASHA

(*AD 1271–1332; AH 669–732*)

Little is known about the life of this Turkish mystic and poet. His first name was Ali, but he is simply known as Ashiq ('Lover', i.e., a lover of God, a name given to an ecstatic mystic), while Pasha is an honorific.

His most famous work is the long masnavi poem *Gahribnameh* (*The Book of the Stranger*), which is notable for its orthodox Muslim viewpoint at a time when many heterodox Muslim sects were flourishing.

Ashiq Pasha is popular in Turkey and Central Asia, but his poetry is not highly regarded in literary circles. However, as one of the earliest mystics writing in Turkish, his work and ideas are significant.

LOVE OF GOD

Be thou in the Love of God both leal and true.

These at once thy servants are, thy source, thy heart;

Ne'er let doubt thereof within thy bosom start.

Greater these than thou to outward seeing are,

Lesser these than thou in inward being are.

If one look unto the form, these nourish thee;

Know thou yet that they in truth thy servants be.

Come are these to nourish and sustain thy frame,

Come they are not for to make thee slave to them.

Every thing doth serve the soul with one accord,

While the soul itself is come to serve the Lord.

Pity if it should its servants' servant be,

To its own dependents paying service fee.

To the wise these words enow the meaning show;

O my mad one, from these words will meaning grow.

Nor would more of words avail the fool in aught;

Hearing, of their meaning he would gather naught.

Whosoever shall have known himself in truth,

He, collected, to himself is come in sooth.

Unto him the root of all the meaning's known,

Therefore is he judge and subject both in one.

To the lover 'tis Love's words the meaning show,

Never shall the loveless frere the meaning know.

O my God! of him to whom these words are clear

Quicken Thou the love, that with his soul he hear;

Never let him from Thy love depart or stray,

Losing ne'er in Either World the Narrow Way.

E. J. W. Gibb

THE PATH

If thou'rt mate, O heart, with one who knows the Path,
Or if thou thyself art one who vision hath,
Learn its lesson from each thing that thou dost see,
So thou mayest know the Source whence all things be.
If the eye learn of things seen their lessoning,
In the heart will knowledge surely sprout and spring;
Thence to it the Hidden Treasure will be shown.

E. J. W. Gibb

KNOWLEDGE AND REASON

... 'Tis through Reason Knowledge lives in very deed;
Look through Reason, and therewith this Knowledge read.
Naught of Knowledge his who hath of Reason naught;
He who Reason hath is thence with Knowledge fraught.
He whose Knowledge lives hath this through Reason done,
He who Knowledge wins hath this through Reason won.
Yea, the Knowledge of the Reasonless is dead,
Hence no work of his hath aught accomplished.
'Tis this Reason is the life of Knowledge, sooth;
He who Reason lacks wins not through Knowledge truth.
Who hath Knowledge and yet doth not Reason own?
From a Knowledge such as his result were none.
Thus that Knowledge living is whose comrade true
Reason is from first to last and through and through.
Well, that Knowledge lives through Reason thou dost see;
Look now at what maketh Reason living be.
Look now, what is it that maketh Reason live?
Hearken, that the tale thereof to thee I give.
Love it is makes Reason live, know thou in truth;
Dead the Loveless Reason is in soothest sooth.

Who may man of Reason yet no Lover be?

Were there such, unworthy of the Truth were he.

Dead the Reason that for comrade hath not Love;

Lower such than e'en the very lusts thereof.

For such Reason as with Love trod not the road

Wisdom and the Mysteries were never food.

'Tis this holy Love is Reason's life indeed;

Love it is that Reason up to God doth lead.

Whate'er Reason is not in that Presence dazed –

Know the Love of God hath not its life upraised.

Lo this Reason's life is Love in very sooth;

See how Loveless Reason ne'er may win the Truth.

Well thou knowest now this Reason's life is Love;

Look at Love and see from whence its life doth prove,

See through what it is that Love is thus alive;

Know in truth the Truth to Love its life doth give.

Yea, the life of Love is through the Truth alone;

Parted from the Truth, hath Love nor stead nor wone.

In the world below hath Love no fond desire,

To the Truth alone its wistful hopes aspire.

Naught in Love beside the Truth may ever be;

So the heart is filled, nor seeketh worldly fee.

Ne'er in Love do name and fame exultant rise;

But in Love full many a 'hidden treasure' lies.

'Tis the Truth's own word that by Love's tongue is said,

'Tis the Truth's own work that by Love's hand is sped;

'Tis the Truth's own light that looketh through Love's eye,

Therefore doth it build at times, at times destroy.

Reason, Spirit, Body, Soul are slaves to Love,

For the Truth hath filled Love; doubt ne'er thereof.

Since it is the Truth makes Love alive in sooth,

Hold thou fast by Love that thou mayst win the Truth.

Love is His, the Lover and the Loved is He;

So thou wouldest win to Him, a Lover be.

Know that Love may never be from Him apart,

Ne'er for aught beside take then from Love thy heart.

Love is life of all, the Truth is life of Love;

Hid within the Signless doth that Signless move.

E. J. W. Gibb

HAFIZ SHIRAZI

(c. AD 1320–89; c. AH 720–91)

Khwaja Shamsuddin Muhammad Hafiz was born in Shiraz and is generally known as ‘Hafiz’, which designates someone who has learned the Qur’an by heart. The verse form that Hafiz excelled at was the ghazal, his beautiful lyric poems expressing Sufi themes.

He is thought to have received a traditional education and lectured on the Qur’an and other theological subjects, and he is one of those great poets whose work is open to both secular and mystical interpretation. One of the finest lyric poets of Persia, his work – especially his *Divan* – remains extremely popular in all Persian-speaking countries.

His elaborate tomb, the Hafezieh, is in the Musalla Gardens of Shiraz.

WITH YOUR BLACK LASHES

With your black lashes,

Many doubts in Belief you have sown.

Come, with your languid eyes

Give me that grief that makes me feel alone!

The two worlds to your beauty and to Saqi I bestow;

Through Love's blessing, greater wealth I came to know.

Where are you my love? The nightingale sings at dawn.

Last night's drunkenness and love I now recall, forlorn.

The night I die, I will straight to heaven ascend,

If I keep true to the flame of your Love, my friend.

The story of desire that I write and openly proclaim,

O *Hafiz*, it is not for the need of recognition or acclaim!

SO LONG AS TAVERN AND WINE ABOUND

So long as the tavern and the glorious wine abound,

So long will I worship at that hallowed ground!

I dwell in the circle of the master giver of wine;

Loyal to him I was and to his will incline.

When you pass my grave, O traveller, pray,

For it is here that all the drinkers of the world

Come for pilgrimage each day.

On the dusty path where

Your feet have left their trace,

Discerning men still bow their heads

And sing your praise.

Away you arrogant puritan!

Between you and me

There is a veil

That shall remain eternally.

O you, whose heart has never turned to me,

My heart will forever be drawn to Thee.

O puritan, do not blame us sinners

From your pulpit high.

Who knows how you'll end up

When you die?

When my eye enters the grave in Love of Thee,

Till doomsday Thine image is all that I will see.

Knowing *Hafiz's* fate, it's not surprising,

As he lacks such charms,

His Beloved will be in someone else's arms!

RISE UP, O SAQI!

Rise up, O Saqi! With the glimmering wine

Light up this empty glass of mine!

I see my lover's face reflected in the cup,

Yet you, unaware, think I'm drunk with wine.

A heart that's full of love can never die;

Eternal is its presence in this fleeting world.

So many beauties roam the world with pride,

But none can match my love's grace or style.

If you pass my friend's abode, O morning breeze,

Do give my love my message, please.

A CORNER OF THE TAVERN

A corner of the tavern,

my place of worship;

The Wine-giver's call,

my prayer.

Fear not my friend,

if music does not play

In the morning,

my sigh shall rise with the day.

Free from kings

and beggars alike,

dust of my Beloved's

Doorstep will suffice.

The mosque or tavern,

wherever I went,

It's you I sought.

No other thought

was my intent.

By death's sword

I may be carried away,

Or else, I'm loyal

to my dying day.

From the day

I've sought you

The throne of the Sun

has been my abode.

It's not in my power

not to sin, *Hafiz*,

But honesty demands

I own up to it!

LAST NIGHT I DREAMT

Last night I dreamt
Of angels descending into the tavern;
Taking the clay of Adam,
They fashioned a cup
And the dwellers of heaven
Sat with me
And the heady brew was passed around.
Houris danced,
Thanks were offered to the Lord most high;
Friends had made amends,
The cup of thanks imbibed in ecstasy.
The sectarian path was left behind;
They had strayed from truth of unity
And followed trivial fantasies.

The heavens could not bear my debt
And wrote me as a madman in my fate.
But lovers bled their hearts
And on the face of the Beloved
Did a beauty spot create.

The fire that burns

In the flame of the lamp

Is not the fire;

It burns in the essence of

The moth and consumes him entire.

None has lifted the veil

From reality as, *Hafiz*, you have done.

You have unravelled the locks of

Poetry's bride and with your skill adorned!

WHEN SHALL I GET TO KISS THEE?

‘When shall I get to kiss thee?’ I asked.

‘By all means you can forever ask,’ she answered.

‘Your lips ask a heavy price,’ I said.

‘It’s a fair exchange for one so fair,’ she said.

‘What lips are worthy for your mouth and lips?’ I asked.

‘Only the discerning can this secret know,’ she answered.

‘Don’t worship idols, be with the Truth,’ I said.

‘In the Way of Love, both are allowed,’ she said.

I said, ‘The tavern helps to heal the heart.’

‘Blessed are those who heal the lonely heart,’ she answered.

‘It’s not religion, the priestly robe, the wine,’ I said.

‘But to the gnostic both lead to the Divine,’ she answered.

‘What use to an old man of youthful lips?’ I asked.

‘By such sweet kissing, he grows young!’ she answered.

‘When shall the bridegroom embrace the bride?’

‘When the stars are that way inclined.’

I said, ‘The prayer of *Hafiz* is for His glory.’

‘This is the prayer of angels too, in heaven,’ she answered.

IN THE COMPANY OF WINE-GIVERS

In the company of the Wine-givers

I found God;

It's strange indeed that in that darkness

I found Light.

O pilgrim of the holy place,

Don't boast to me,

For you have only seen His House,

While He has shown Himself to me!

I yearned to

Reach and touch sweet beauty's musky folds;

It's merely a fancy,

A dream in error that I had.

A burning heart, tears,

sighs and weeping, endlessly;

All these are favours

That your love bestows on me.

In my mind I see your image

Come alive and your memory prevails.

What can I say? What I have seen

Beyond the Veil!

The Musk of China or Khutan¹

Cannot compare with that fragrance fair

That the morning breeze brings to me

From your perfumed hair!

Friends, do not be so critical

Of *Hafiz* and his ways of love;

I see him

As a secret lover of God above.

THE PURITAN LEFT HIS SOLITUDE

The puritan left his solitude
Last night; to the tavern went,
Broke all his vows of piety
And drank wine to his heart's content.

The love of his youth
Appeared as in a dream
And this ageing lover
Went mad with love.

The youth robbed him of
Reason and his chastity.
In pursuit of his Beloved, mad, deranged,
He was from kith and kin estranged.

The fire of the rose's cheek
Burnt the nightingale's heart;
The laughing flame
Tormented the devoted moth.

The Saqi's beguiling eyes
Recited a magic spell;

Our circle of prayer

Turned into a drinker's den.

The Sufi that yesterday

Was ranting against wine and cup,

Took a sip last night

Got drunk and became wise!

Now *Hafiz's* destination

Is the place of worship of the Lord.

The heart has gone to the Beloved

The soul has gone to the only Love!

I HAVE LOST MY HEART

I've lost my heart.

My secret's out.

O pure of heart!

My ship is stuck;

O wind, arise!

Perhaps the shore

Will greet our eyes.

Mere fantasy, this

Ephemeral world lasts only for a day;

It's best to be with friends

And speak and pass the time away.

Last night

Amongst flowers and wine,

The nightingale sang

A song divine:

Bring forth the jug

O drinkers, rise!

In the two worlds

To gain peace of mind,

Love your friends

And to your enemies be kind.

I was not one

Chosen to roam

The pious way;

If You dislike that

Then alter my fate

I pray.

Be not vain, for you will

Burn like a candle's flame.

That Beloved whom you so adore

Can turn molten rock to wax,

Will put all others to shame.

When destitution, need, grab hold of you

That is the time to dance and sing,

For often the world

Can turn a beggar into a king.

If the singer

Sings this song, perchance

Old pious men will

Rise and join the dance!

Hafiz did not

Of his choice wear

This wine-soaked cloak;

O puritan Sheikh, beware!

He is helpless;

It was thus ordained!

GOOD DEEDS

Good deeds

And I, a sinner,

We're far apart;

On different plains,

A different way,

the way of the heart!

No common ground:

We drinkers here;

you puritans there!

The sermon and

The song of the lute!

How can the two compare?

It weighs upon my heart,

This lie of living

in fake purity.

Where is the Saqi?

Where the wine?

They're worlds apart!

What will my enemies

Gain by staring at my

Beloved's face so fair?

They are as dying lamps

And she the brightest Sun

beyond compare!

The thought of the Beloved

Drove out the thought

of days gone by.

Where did the vanity go?

Where is the anger gone?

Where is my pride?

Do not expect

From *Hafiz*

A life of peacefulness,

repose.

What is patience?

What is peace?

Who knows?

THE TAVERN DOOR

Anyone who knows the way to the tavern door

Would not waste his time knocking on other doors.

He who found the doorstep of the tavern,

Through wine, found the secret of heaven.

He who read the mystery in the cup of wine,

Found in the dust the secrets of powers divine.

We did not ask for mercy from the Saqi's eyes;

He knows it's natural to suffer in love.

Expect nothing from us but blind loyalty,

Madness unrelenting,

For in our creed, O Sheikh,

Reason and sanity are sins!

I cried so much

At the fate dealt out to me,

By the morning star.

The Sun is witness and the Moon

Knows it!

The story of

Hafiz and his drinking

Has spread far and wide;

The police and the king know it.

What is there to hide?

WORSHIPPING THE OUTER FORM

Worshipping the outer form,

O puritan,

You are unaware

Of my real state.

Say what you like,

I care not for

Your words of hate!

Whatever the traveller

Meets on this path

is for the good.

On this righteous way

No heart can go astray!

In this game of chess

Our pawn confronts

The rook with courage and grace.

In this game that lovers play,

The king takes second place!

Whoever wants to enter

Tell him, 'Come.'

Whoever wants to leave

Can go as he please;

This [Khanqah](#) has no gate,

No gatekeeper, nor keys.

It's our lack

Of form that

Makes the cloak

Unfit to wear;

Else Your blessings are

By no means small.

At the tavern's door,

Lovers gather and meet.

The vainglorious have no place

On the wine-seller's street.

Eternal is the blessing

Of the guide and master

Of Love's street.

The puritan's and the Mullah's

Kindness, unreliable,

Ever-altering with his needs.

No need to take

The head of the table, *Hafiz*,

For the true Lover there is no shame.

He has no need for name or fame!

*O Puritan Zahid!*¹

O puritan *Zahid*,

Do not find fault in

The drinkers at the inn.

You will not have to account

For another's sin.

Whether I'm good or bad

It's up to me;

Each shall reap

What he has sown

And he is free.

Each is seeking his Beloved,

Whether sober or drunk.

Every place is a place of Love,

Temple or mosque, mullah or monk.

It's the dust of the tavern door

And my bowed head.

If the Beloved does not understand,

Say, 'I have a stone to break my head.'

Ever hopeful of eternal grace, I live.

What do you know of who is good

And who is bad, behind the veil?

O *Hafiz*, if you have the wine cup

In your hand when you die,

It will take you straight

From the tavern to heaven most high.

BEAUTY RADIATED IN ETERNITY

Beauty radiated in eternity

With its light;

Love was born

And set the worlds alight.

It revealed itself to angels

Who knew not how to love;

It turned shyly towards man

And set fire to his heart.

Reason ventured to light

Its own flame and wear the crown,

But Your radiance

Turned the world

Of reason upside down.

Others got pleasure

As was their fate.

My heart was

Towards sadness inclined;

For me, sorrow was destined.

Beauty yearned to see itself;

It turned to man to sing its praise.

Hafiz wrote this song

Drunk with Love,

From a heart

Carrying a happy secret.

ASK NOT OF ME

Ask not of me

The strait and narrow;

I am drunk.

And drinking

Is what I am known for

Since the moment of *Elast*.

Since I performed my

Ablution in the stream of Love

I have prayed to all that

Invokes God above.

Give me wine, O friend,

So I can tell you

The secrets of God's will

And to you reveal

Who my Beloved is,

And whose fragrance

Makes me drunk and reel.

Here, the mountain

Is no bigger than the ant;

Turn not away

From the blessings

Of the Lord Divine,

O drinker of wine!

May you forever bloom,

For in the garden of my sight

No flower I see

Can match your beauty

Flowering free.

Through Your Love

Did *Hafiz* meaning gain.

The desire for union

With you is all that matters;

All else is vain!

I AM A SLAVE OF LOVE

With joy in my heart

I fearlessly say to all

I am a slave of Love

And free of the two worlds

Which hold men in thrall.

The life-giving shade,

The enticing houris,

And the heavenly pool,

I forgot them all

Once I found your street.

On my heart's page

Is written the letter *alif*;

What can I do?

No other letter did my master teach!

Since I joined

The circle where

The worshippers of Love meet,

Each day another sorrow

Comes and greets my heart.

Wipe these tears

Off *Hafiz's* face with your dark hair,

Or else this flood will take its toll

And leave him in despair.

THE RULE

It's a

Rule

Given by the Master

From days of old:

Wine is forbidden,

Unless you have a lover

Or a friend.

I want to tear

This august robe of lies

I wear;

The company of liars

Is bad for the soul

And is a snare.

Yearning for a drop

From my lover's lips

So sweet,

I've waited at the door

Of the tavern,

At her feet.

Perhaps she's forgotten
The friendship we once had;
O morning breeze,
Remind her of the old days
And make our hearts glad.

Try some other place
To find a cure;
Love's sickness
Is not cured
By the doctor's medicine.

O *Hafiz*, mourn not
That you have no
Silver or gold; thank God.
What better wealth
Is there in life
Than pure intent
And spiritual health?

O KING OF BEAUTY

O king of beauty,

Turn your gaze

Upon this beggar

of yours.

Have pity

On this

Forlorn, helpless

Devotee

of yours.

The heart of this

Mystic yearns and longs

For your

life-giving glance.

With your dark

Mysterious eyes

Fulfil his desire,

make him dance!

The candle,

Moth, the rose,

The nightingale,

All are here

each and every one.

O friend,

Take pity

On my state.

I'm so alone!

How long

Will you

Your lovers deny?

For God's sake,

Be our friend

And deny us not

Your beauty's

infinite grace.

Listen not to the enemy's

Accusations and gossip.

Be loyal to your

Devotee, your friend, *Hafiz*.

IT'S BETTER TO PAWN THIS ROBE

It's better to pawn this for some wine,

This robe of piety I own.

It's better to drown it in red wine,

This meaningless book of mine!

I've wasted my life,

But I know this much:

It's better spent in the tavern,

Lying drunk.

I will not tell the story

Of the heart to people,

For to tell this tale

It's better done with

Song and dance.

So long as fate

Is thus inclined to treat mankind,

It's better that I love the Saqi

And worship the wine.

Since self-interest is

Far removed from the dervish,

It's better to have a broken heart

And tearful eyes.

Since you are old, *Hafiz*,

Stay away from the tavern.

Drunkenness and lust

Best suit the young!

I AM A LOVER

I am a Lover.

What need have I for religion or unbelief?

I am thirsty for wine,

What need have I for union or separation?

My [qiblah](#) and my prayer arch is my Beloved.

If not drunk, thus, what need I for drinking?

Since in the two worlds I find my Beloved,

What need have I for heaven and hell, of houris and slaves?

He that is steadfast in the path of Love

Has no need for sorrow or pain;

What need has he for balm and cures?

Everywhere I saw your face

And in every face I saw my Beloved's trace.

I saw Him in myself.

In my beauty, I my lover's beauty saw.

The prayer of the puritan

Is in the arch of the mosque;

The prayer of the Lovers

Is on the gallows!

In comparison to a drop of that wine, *Hafiz*,

All reason and sense are useless.

MAGHRIBI

(c. AD 1349–1406; c. AH 750–809)

Muhammad Shirin Maghribi, a native of Tabriz, was called Maghribi because he travelled in the Mahgrib, a region in North Africa.

A follower of a sheikh in the line of Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi, Maghribi's poetry reflects the idea of the unity of all religions, and the message is one of love and beauty as a reflection of the Creator's image. He is perhaps one of the most pantheistic of all the poets included here.

WHEN THE SUN OF YOUR FACE

When the Sun of your face shone,

The atoms of the two worlds came to life.

When that Sun cast its shadow far and wide

From that shadow all things emerged alive.

Each atom shone like the Sun

From the light that your bright face bestowed.

Each atom exists because of the Sun

And the Sun is manifest through each atom.

The sea of existence threw up waves

And the waves were hurled towards the shore;

The waves sank and rose up again

In myriad, alluring and delightful forms.

Like violets, meanings sprang up,

Like the down on a beautiful face;

Then blossomed the anemones of Truth.

A thousand tall cypresses appeared.

What were these but the essence of the wave?

What was the wave? The essence of the sea.

Each part that is, is a part of the Whole

And the Whole is nothing but its parts.

What are parts? The Whole manifested.

What are things? The shadow of names.

What are names? The Sun revealed;

The Sun of the Beauty of the Supreme;

What is the shore? It's Contingent Being,

Which is the Book of God most high.

O *Maghribi*, stop this talk;

Do not reveal the secret of the Worlds!

O YOU WHO GAVE LIFE TO THE WORLD

O You who gave life to the world

With Your life-enhancing face!

You whose face is reflected

In the mirror of the universe!

When the Beloved

Looked into the mirror

It was by itself enamoured.

Each moment Your face looks

At its own Beauty.

To its own eye

It appears in alluring forms.

It looks thus through lovers' eyes,

So as to witness its own Beauty in idols.

To see itself, Your face created a mirror;

That mirror it called Adam and Eve.

Its own Beauty through Adam's eyes it saw;

Because of this he became a Mirror for all the Names.

O You who have created light with Your Beauty

And who have seen Your face in Your own eyes!

Since You are the seer and the seen,

There is none else but You,

Then why this tumult and this worldly strife?

O *Maghribi*, the skies are full of excitement

When the King of Beauty pitches His tent in the desert.

O CENTRE AND PIVOT OF BEING

O Centre and Pivot of Being, and Circumference of Bounty,

O Fixed as the Pole, and Fickle as the Sphere!

If I send greetings to Thee, Thou art the greeting.

And if I invoke blessings on Thee, Thou art the blessing!

How can any one give Thee to Thyself? Tell me now,

O Thou who art Thine own alms-giver and Thine own alms!

O Most Comprehensive of Manifestations, and Most Perfect in Manifestation,

O Gulf of gulfs, and O Combiner of diversities!

O Most Beauteous of the beautiful, and O most Fair of the fair,

O most Gracious of the graceful, O most Subtle of subtleties!

Thou art at once both the Bane and the Balm, both Sorrow and Joy,

Both Lock and Key, both Prison and Deliverance!

Thou art both the Treasure and the Talisman, both Body and Soul,

Both Name and Named, both Essence and Attribute!

Thou art both Western (*Maghribi*) and West, both Eastern and East,

Alike Throne, and Carpet, and Element, and Heavens, and Space!

E. G. Browne

DO NOT ASK

Do not ask of [madrasah](#) or monastery!

Pass by tradition and do not ask about the right Way.

Adopt poverty and selflessness and be happy;

Forget the past and look to the future!

When you escape the prison of this body

Ask only of the king and his court;

From the people who practise poverty

Ask about its grace and taste.

Ask not the ones who are slaves to wealth

And rank and waste...

When you staked your head in all sincerity,

Do not ask for your cap, if they have stolen it.

My state, O Friend, is not hidden from you.

Do not ask for witnesses about me!

The sin of his existence is to be immersed in You.

Apart from this sin, do not ask him of any other;

Maghribi has come full of apology, O Friend.

Overlook his sin and show Your grace to him.

BELOVED'S STREET

We've left behind

The madrasah, the temple and monastery

And sat down with our Beloved in the street

Of the Master.

We've thrown away the prayer mat

And the rosary;

In service of the Christian child

We've put on the girdle.

On wine-house benches we've torn up our priestly robe;

In the tavern of drinkers we've broken our vows of piety!

We have abandoned counting the rosary beads

And escaped from the snare of virtue, piety and abstinence!

In this quarter we annihilated our existence.

When we became Nothing, we were Everything.

Not from us the meaning of Wisdom and Learning.

O Learned man, we are Lovers who are drunk!

Thank God that we have abandoned worship of the Self;

We are totally free and worship only the wine!

We are drunk and wild and yearning for wine!

Our friend is he who is drunk and ruined.

Maghribi has moved his baggage from this gathering;

He was a barrier in our path – we're free!

YOU ARE A DROP

You are a drop, speak not of the ocean.

You are an atom, speak not of the mighty Sun.

You are of today, speak of today;

Speak not of yesterday or tomorrow.

Since you know not of earth and sky

Talk no more of above or below.

Since you do not have musical talent,

Speak not of tune or tone.

Go beyond No and Yes, my son;

Speak not of bearing witness

With *La* or *Illa*,¹ my son.

If they ask you to sacrifice yourself

Go and give it up, and do not speak;

Till you understand who 'I' and 'We' are,

Be quiet; speak not of 'We' and 'I'.

Unless, like Adam, you know the true Names

Do not speak about the sacred Names.

He who is the essence of Everything,

He asked *Maghribi* not to speak of Things.

O END OF EVERY BEGINNING

O end of every beginning,

O beginning of every end,

O manifest of every hidden,

O hidden of all revealed!

The light of Your beauty

In every believer's eye does shine;

The sign of Your anger

In every denier's heart we find.

You thank him and he is You,

Himself giver and receiver,

Himself the gift and the thanking.

None but You, the worshipped;

None but You, the worshipper;

None but You, the witness;

None but You, the speaker.

When the Saqi gave *Maghribi* the wine

Of eternal life

He was annihilated and eternal.

He was non-existent and existent!

EACH WAY I TURNED

Each way I turned

I turned to You;

Each place I reached

Was the path to You.

Each place of worship

I entered to pray,

I saw the arch of Your brow

In every arch and every doorway.

I saw the face of worldly beauty

But I saw it in the mirror of Your face.

In the manifest and the hidden,

In the ideal and the real,

All have looked and only to You.

Don't ask about *Maghribi*.

He is by madness struck –

By those dark lashes of Yours!

SHAH NIMATULLAH

(d. AD 1431; AH 834)

The Islamic scholar and Sufi poet Shah Nimatullah Wali, who was descended from the sixth Shiite Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, was the founder and **qutub** (or master) of the Nimatullahi Sufi order.

He was born into a Sufi family in Aleppo, Syria, and travelled widely throughout the Muslim world studying the philosophies of many masters, including the writings of the great Sufi philosopher and mystic Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi.

KING AND BEGGAR ARE ONE

King and beggar are one, are one.

The hungry and sated are one, are one.

Sorrowful I am and drink the dregs.

The dregs, sorrow and cure, are one, are one.

There is none but One in this world.

Speak not of two, God is one, is One.

I have seen a thousand mirrors,

But the Beloved's face is one, is one.

We are stricken by one who's fair and tall,

But the stricken and the illness are one, are one.

A drop, the sea, the wave and the four elements

Are without doubt in our sight but One, but One.

Nimatullah is one in the two worlds.

Seek him here, he's one, he's one.

THE POINT OF THE CIRCLE

The point appeared in the circle

And was not;

But it was the dot

That the circle begot.

The point appears

As a circle, as it revolves

In the eyes of him

Who a circle draws.

When the point

Completed the circle

Its beginning and end

Were one.

When the compass

Did the circle complete

It was wrapped up

And rested its feet.

Without existence

Not-being are we;

We who are Not

And You existence free.

I said the whole world was His dream;

Then I saw His dream was He.

Sweeter than the words of our guide,

Nimatullah knows no other words!

THE NAMED IS ONE

The named is One, and has a hundred thousand names.

The Being one, and appears in a hundred thousand forms.

His appearance is the cup, its meaning the wine;

Though in my eyes they're one and the same.

Without His Being the Universe is non-existent,

But of His Being and gift the world is a symbol.

The world is because of His universal Being;

Whatever you see is His Blessing and Grace.

He is Eternal, we are not.

Let us lose ourselves in Him.

The world is veiled from itself,

Nay the world itself is a veil.

This veil is for ever, O my soul.

O Friend of God, O proof of mine,

I have related the state of this world to you

So that you can know the world, and so farewell!

QASIMUL ANWAR

(AD 1356–1433; AH 757–837)

The mystic and poet Qasimul Anwar was born in the village of Sarab near Tabriz in Iran, although he settled in Herat, now in western Afghanistan. Hardly a prolific poet, Qasimul Anwar wrote a slim divan and a couple of masnavis. He was a minor poet, but he has an individual voice.

FILL MY CUP

Do me a favour, Saqi.

Fill me up

That shining cup

Of wine with

That spirit of the holy,

That soul most high, divine.

Give us this day

That wine that

Brings success and

Frees us from all care;

And bestow also a draught

Upon that preacher fair!

If you desire, Saqi, that

The atoms of the universe

Also dance with you,

Then loosen your dark tresses,

Curled and tangled,

And they will follow too!

Chide me not, my concerned friend.

Stop your constant warning and talk

Of fear and dread;

All your good advice will not drive away

This madness from my head.

You say, 'Lose yourself

To find yourself again.'

The meaning of this riddle

I find very hard to explain.

Each time I die

I get a hundred other lives

In its place.

None can limit the power

Of Christ's miracles or

His healing grace.

Qasim did not become a lover

Out of his own desire;

But what can he do

When he is in the power

Of one who is

So fair, so true?

BEFORE THE MOSQUE AND TEMPLE

Before the mosque and temple

Came to be,

We existed with You

In another plane.

No need for a message

To be passed to us.

When we are together

We need no intermediary.

Let not the mention of the other

Come on your tongue;

It's not the way for people of the heart

To speak of others but the Friend.

Sobriety is not necessary

When you tread on the mystic path;

Here each atom in the universe

Is intoxicating, drunk.

O puritan, don't pronounce

That this is bad and that forbid;

Every good thing is allowed

To those who are good.

Qasim beware, and rein

In your speech.

It's best

Let the [Pir](#) of Love

Speak of the rest.

IN SIX DAYS

'In six days' runs God's Word, while Seven

Marks the divisions of the Heaven.

Then at the last 'He mounts His Throne';¹

Nay, Thrones, to which no limit's known.

Each mote's a Throne, to put it plain,

Where He in some new Name doth reign:

Know this, and so to Truth attain!

'Fie, fie!' the zealot answers back

Whate'er I say. I cry, 'Alack!'

'Who from the Prophet's cup drinks free

God's Wine, escapes calamity,

And over-boldness to dispense

With proper forms of reverence!'

O drunk with fancies, cease to bawl,

Nor plague us with thy drunken brawl!

To glory in thine ignorance

Is but thine blindness to enhance.

O *Qasimi*, what canst thou find

In jurists blind with leaders blind?

Repeat a [Fatih](#)a, I pray,

That so this plague may pass away!

E. G. Browne

KABIR

(*AD 1398–1447; AH 800–51*)

Kabir was born near the holy city of Varanasi or Benares. He is regarded as a poet-saint, closely associated with the bhakti or Hindu devotional movement in India.

It is said that Kabir was raised by Muslim weavers and trained by Hindu masters. As such, his personal philosophy combined concepts from both religions, although he rejected the idea of religion itself, as well as the notion of sects.

Virtually illiterate, Kabir was an oral Hindi poet. His works were passed on in songs and are often sung in temples and qawwali gatherings. His poems are found in the *Adi Granth* (literally, *The First Book*), an early compilation of the Sikh scriptures.

Kabir's poetry is much loved by Sufis and he himself is regarded as a Sufi poet in Hindi. The *Bijak* (*Seedling*), a compilation of poetry, is considered his most important work, though he is famous for his *Dohas*, couplets in the Hindi form which lend themselves to oral transmission.

O FRIEND, HOPE FOR HIM

O friend, hope for Him whilst you live,

Know whilst you live, understand whilst you live:

For in life deliverance abides.

If your bonds be not broken whilst living,

What hope of deliverance in death?

It is but an empty dream, that the soul shall have union with Him

Because it has passed from the body:

If He is found now, He is found then,

If not, we do but go to dwell in the City of Death.

If you have union now, you shall have it hereafter.

Bathe in the truth, know the true Guru,

Have faith in the true Name!

Kabir says: 'It is the Spirit of the quest which helps;

I am the slave of this Spirit of the quest!'

Rabindranath Tagore

DO NOT GO TO THE GARDEN OF FLOWERS

Do not go to the garden of flowers!

O friend, go not there;

In your body is the garden of flowers.

Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus

And there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.

Rabindranath Tagore

THE MOON SHINES IN MY BODY

The Moon shines in my body, but my blind eyes cannot see it:

The Moon is within me, and so is the Sun.

The unstruck drum of Eternity is sounded within me; but my deaf ears cannot hear it.

So long as man clamours for the 'I' and the 'Mine', his works are as naught:

When all love of the 'I' and the 'Mine' is dead, then the work of the Lord is done.

For work has no other aim than the getting of knowledge:

When that comes, then work is put away.

The flower blooms for the fruit: when the fruit comes, the flower withers.

The musk is in the deer, but it seeks it not within itself: it wanders in quest of grass.

Rabindranath Tagore

THE SECRET WORD

O how may I ever express that secret word?

O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:

If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.

He makes the inner and the outer worlds to be indivisibly one;

The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.

He is neither manifest nor hidden, He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:

There are no words to tell that which He is.

Rabindranath Tagore

THE WORD

Find the word, understand the word,

Depend on the word;

The word is heaven and space, the word the earth,

The word the universe.

The word is in our ears, the word is on our tongues,

The word the idol.

The word is the holy book, the word is harmony,

The word is music.

The word is magic, the word the Guru,

The word is the body, the word is the spirit, the word is being,

The word Not-being.

The word is man, the word is woman,

The Worshipped Great.

The word is the seen and unseen, the word is the existent

And the non-existent.

Know the word, says *Kabir*,

The word is All-powerful.

ALL JEWELS

All jewels are made of the same gold;

We give them different names.

Some call it prayer, others *Namaz*;

Some say Hindu, some say Muslim.

He reads the Veda, he the Qur'an;

He is a Mullah, he a *pandit*,

The vessels are of the same earth made;

We give them different names.

Says *Kabir*: They are misguided all;

God is far away from all

Who waste their time

Who argue and name call.

THE RIVER AND THE WAVE

The river

And the wave are the same.

When it rises up, it's water;

When it subsides, it's water.

Otherwise it cannot be.

You call it wave, you see,

But other than water it cannot be.

The Creator is the world

And the world the Creator.

LISTEN TO THE HEART

He is reflected in the mirror

Yet He is everywhere.

When the mirror of the heart is clean,

Only then He's clearly seen.

Like water makes ice,

And ice becomes water and steam,

So when hearts melt and join,

They become one as a running stream.

WHO AM I?

Not a believer, nor a non-believer I.

I am not chaste, nor a sinner am I.

I do not say, I do not hear.

I am not master, nor slave am I.

I am not tied, I am not free,

Nor am I without any bounds.

I am not alone, nor am I attached.

Not bound for heaven or hell am I.

All actions are mine and yet not mine;

Only someone wise can decipher

These strange words of mine!

Kabir does not affirm or deny!

UNITY

A bubble risen from a river

Hangs above the waters;

It is the river and not separate

From the waves.

Its life is so long as it's risen.

When it falls, it becomes One

With the river, its Creator.

ILLUSION

Like a wild dog

In a palace of mirrors

Barks himself to death,

Like a lion dives into the well

When it sees its own reflection,

Or an elephant breaks its neck

Against shining rocks,

The greedy monkey

Grabs a trap and then has

To dance to the master's tune.

And you, slave of Illusion,

Who has captured you!

LIGHT

The light of the Sun, the Moon and the stars shines bright:

The melody of love swells forth, and the rhythm of love's detachment beats the time.

Day and night, the chorus of music fills the heavens; and *Kabir* says:

'My Beloved One gleams like the lightning flash in the sky.'

Rabindranath Tagore

ABDUR-RAHMAN JAMI

(AD 1414–92; AH 817–97)

One of the last great Sufi poets, Nur ud-Din Abdur-Rahman Jami was born in the town of Jam in Khorasan, now in the Ghor Province of Afghanistan. A remarkable man, he was a great poet, scholar and mystic.

Aside from his poetry, which includes three divans of ghazals and seven romantic and didactic masnavis, he wrote about the Prophet, mysticism, Arabic grammar, rhyme, prosody, music and the lives of saints and mystics. His major poetical works are *Behiristan (Abode of Spring)* and *Haft Awrang (Seven Thrones of Grace)*, which includes his famous masnavis *Yusuf and Zulaikha* and *Salaman and Absal*, a version of the Leila and Majnun story.

Jami was certainly the last of the great poets of the Persian language and he was regarded by his contemporaries as beyond praise or comparison. He died in Herat, Afghanistan.

BY THE GARDEN

By the garden, the brink of a stream,

And a goblet in my hand,

Rise up, Saqi! Pour the wine!

Abstinence here is a crime!

If the Sheikh is drunk with religion,

In the temple or mosque in fear,

Give me the tavern, full of drunks,

Such ecstasy is enduring here.

You kissed the goblet with your lips

And I so drunk that I did not know

Which are your red lips divine

And where is the red, red wine.

No need to draw your sword

To cleave my heart in two;

Leave it aside, one glance

Is enough and will do.

To the men of reason

Do not explain the pains of love;

Reveal not this secret precious

To the common and the ungracious.

Jami is drunk with your Love

And has not seen the wine or cup;

In this banquet of Love divine

What need for cup or wine?

THE MEANING OF LOVE

When eternity's dawn whispered 'Love',

Love cast the fire of desire in the pen.

The pen arose from the tablet of eternity

And drew a hundred forms of beauty.

The skies are but the offspring of Love;

The elements fell to earth through Love.

Without Love, no good or evil is discerned;

That which is not of Love is itself non-existent.

This lofty azure roof upon the world

That revolves through day and night above

Is the Lotus of Love's garden,

Is the curl on the polo stick of Love.

The magnetism that is in the heart of stone

That grips the iron with such a strong grip

Is the Love that has such iron will;

Appearing from within the stone,

Behold the stone in its resting place

Is bereft without love for its opposite.

From this you can see the sorrow of the stricken

And the Love they feel for the Beloved.

It's true that Love is full of pain

But it is also the solace of the Pure.

How can man escape this cycle of

Day and night

Without the blessing of Love?

O YOU, WHOSE BEAUTY

O You, whose Beauty appears in all that is manifest,

May a thousand revered spirits be Your sacrifice!

Like a flute I sing the song of separation from You,

Yet it's true that You are near to me at each instant.

It's Love that reveals itself to us in all we see;

Sometimes dressed as a Monarch grand,

Others as a beggar on the street, a begging bowl in hand.

Arise, O Saqi, and pour that wine

That disperses sorrow from our hearts!

That wine that frees us from the Self

And leaves only the awareness of the Lord.

O *Jami*, the true path to God is Love

And peace be upon him who follows the true path.

I AM SO DRUNK

I am so drunk that wine drips from my eyes;

My heart so burns that I can smell its roasting!

If my Beloved comes unveiled at midnight,

An ageing puritan will rush out of the mosque.

I saw your face at dawn and missed my prayer:

What use is supplication when the Sun has risen?

If a drop of *Jami's* pain falls into the river

The fish will jump out burning with pain!

CREATION (FROM YUSUF AND ZULAIKHA)

In solitude, where Being signless dwelt,
And all the Universe still dormant lay
Concealed in selflessness, One Being was
Exempt from 'I-' or 'Thou-' ness, and apart
From all duality; Beauty Supreme,
Unmanifest, except unto Itself
By Its own light, yet fraught with power to charm
The souls of all; concealed in the Unseen,
An Essence pure, unstained by aught of ill.
No mirror to reflect Its loveliness,
Nor comb to touch Its locks; the morning breeze
Ne'er stirred Its tresses; no collyrium¹
Lent lustre to Its eyes: no rosy cheeks
O'ershadowed by dark curls like hyacinth,
Nor peach-like down were there; no dusky mole
Adorned Its face; no eye had yet beheld
Its image. To Itself It sang of love
In wordless measures. By Itself It cast
The die of love.

But Beauty cannot brook

Concealment and the veil, nor patient rest
Unseen and unadmired: 'twill burst all bonds,
And from Its prison-casement to the world
Reveal Itself. See where the tulip grows
In upland meadows, how in balmy spring
It decks itself; and how amidst its thorns
The wild rose rends its garment, and reveals
Its loveliness. Thou, too, when some rare thought,
Or beauteous image, or deep mystery
Flashes across thy soul, canst not endure
To let it pass, but hold'st it, that perchance
In speech or writing thou may'st send it forth
To charm the world.

Wherever Beauty dwells
Such is its nature, and its heritage
From Everlasting Beauty, which emerged
From realms of purity to shine upon
The worlds, and all the souls which dwell therein.
One gleam fell from It on the Universe,
And on the angels, and this single ray
Dazzled the angels, till their senses whirled

Like the revolving sky. In divers forms
Each mirror showed It forth, and everywhere
Its praise was chanted in new harmonies.

*

Each speck of matter did He constitute
A mirror, causing each one to reflect
The beauty of His visage. From the rose
Flashed forth His beauty, and the nightingale
Beholding it, loved madly. From that Light
The candle drew the lustre which beguiles
The moth to immolation. On the Sun
His Beauty shone, and straightway from the wave
The lotus reared its head. Each shining lock
Of *Leila's* hair attracted *Majnun's* heart,
Because some ray divine reflected shone
In her fair face. 'Twas He to *Shirin's* lips
Who lent that sweetness which had power to steal
The heart from *Parviz*, and from *Ferhad* life.²
His Beauty everywhere doth show itself,
And through the forms of earthly beauties shines

Obscured as through a veil. He did reveal
His face through Yusuf's coat, and so destroyed
Zulaikha's peace. Where'er thou seest a veil,
Beneath that veil He hides. Whatever heart
Doth yield to love, He charms it. In His love
The heart hath life. Longing for Him, the soul
Hath victory. That heart which seems to love
The fair ones of this world, loves Him alone.

Beware! say not, 'He is all-beautiful,
And we His lovers.' Thou art but the glass,
And He the Face³ confronting it, which casts
Its image on the mirror. He alone
Is manifest, and thou in truth art hid.
Pure Love, like Beauty, coming but from Him,
Reveals itself in thee. If steadfastly
Thou canst regard, thou wilt at length perceive
He is the mirror also – He alike
The Treasure and the Casket. 'I' and 'Thou'
Have here no place, and are but phantasies
Vain and unreal. Silence! for this tale
Is endless, and no eloquence hath power

To speak of Him. 'Tis best for us to love

And suffer silently, being as naught.

*

Be thou the thrall of love; make this thine object;

For this one thing seemeth to wise men worthy.

Be thou love's thrall, that thou may'st win thy freedom,

Bear on thy breast its brand, that thou may'st blithe be.

Love's wine will warm thee, and will steal thy senses;

All else is soulless stupor and self-seeking.

Remembrances of love refresh the lover,

Whose voice when lauding love e'er waxeth loudest.

But that he drained a draught from this deep goblet,

In the wide worlds not one would wot of *Majnun*.

Thousands of wise and well-learned men have wended

Through life, who, since for love they had no liking,

Have left nor name, nor note, nor sign, nor story,

Nor tale for future time, nor fame for fortune.

Sweet songsters 'midst the birds are found in plenty,

But, when love's lore is taught by the love-learned,

Of moth and nightingale they most make mention.

Though in this world a hundred tasks thou tryest,
'Tis love alone which from thyself will save thee.
Even from earthly love thy face avert not,
Since to the Real it may serve to raise thee.
Ere *A, B, C* are rightly apprehended,
How canst thou con the pages of thy Qur'an?
A sage (so heard I), unto whom a student
Came craving counsel on the course before him,
Said, 'If thy steps be strangers to love's pathways,
Depart, learn love, and then return before me!
For, should thou fear to drink wine from Form's flagon,
Thou canst not drain the draught of the Ideal.
But yet beware! Be not by Form belated;
Strive rather with all speed the bridge to traverse.
If to the bourn thou fain wouldst bear thy baggage
Upon the bridge let not thy footsteps linger.'

E. G. Browne

SARMAD

(d. AD 1661; AH 1071)

Sarmad was a mystic and poet who came to India from Iran and was probably of Armenian origin. His exact date of birth, like his real name, is not known. He came to India as a trader, fell in love and wandered like a mystic, finally settling in Delhi.

Sarmad aroused the anger of Aurangzeb (1618–1707), the Mogul emperor of Hindustan, as he became closely associated with Dara Shikoh (1615–59), Aurangzeb's older brother and rival to the Mogul throne. Because of his open questioning of orthodox ideas – in the tradition of Hallaj – Sarmad was considered a heretic by conservative religious scholars of the time. Aurangzeb, egged on by these scholars and fearful of Sarmad's influence, had him executed for apostasy in 1661.

Sarmad is best known for his quatrains, although he also wrote many ghazals. His grave is located near the Jama Masjid in Delhi.

QUATRAINS

O veiled one, reveal Yourself and be,

I am searching endlessly for Thee;

My desire is to seek union with You.

How long shall You hide from me?

*

Sarmad, what havoc on religion you have bestowed.

You've sacrificed belief for a pair of beautiful eyes!

Having spent your life on Hadiths and the Qur'an divine,

You went and to that idol worshipper your life consigned!

*

Each one is after this world and hereafter,

I seek freedom from both these imposters.

Make me Yours, that is my only wish.

Tear off Thy veil, reveal the secrets of hereafter!

*

Your alluring ways are seen everywhere.

The message of Your Love is everywhere.

I am Your lover, for this reason alone:

You hide behind the veil and yet are everywhere.

*

O Lord, Thou art merciful, forgive me.

Prove that my cry has reached Thee;

I am a sinner and yet am amazed

At the way Thou shower blessings on me.

*

I am chaste, a Friend is all I need;

No rosary beads nor priestly girdle do I need.

This robe of fake purity is full of deceit.

To elevate my status, this I do not need.

*

O Sheikh, it's best to drink this wine.

Throw off your august robe, taste the Divine.

Why call this blessing a forbidden crime?

There is truth in it, drink up this wine!

*

Whoever abstains from wine is a fool.

Don't call him a man; he is not wise.

Wine is another name for a Lover's pain,

It's the balm of broken hearts.

*

Each looked at the garden of life with greed.

Some sought flowers, and some thorns and perished;

This life is a hidden mystery indeed.

Learn from it, O wise. Take heed!

*

A man who is lost in lust and greed

Is sick in soul and always in need;

A hungry eye is never sated.

Wherever I looked I saw this creed.

*

Wherever there is the pain of Love there is rest.

He who has not this pain is dead at best.

Be not forgetful of wine and Love

If you want from this world what's best.

*

If someone gains a little joy from you

That is a big gain and no loss to you;

Be not forgetful of this rare gift.

The river of life is full of sorrow too.

*

God is the Lord of good and bad,

None can deny this undeniable fact.

If you do not believe this then ask why:

Why is Satan so powerful – and so weak, I?

*

He who unveils for you is a friend.

He who spends all on you is a friend.

You ask of Him and he gives freely;

He helps you when in need, he is a friend.

*

Not only the Kaaba or the temple are His;

The world and the heavens are His.

Why should not the world be mad for Him?

Wise is he who is enthralled by Him.

*

Not everyone knows the secret of Love and wine;

Those dead of heart will never learn this truth divine.

The puritan has no clue of God or Love;

The ignorant can never know this wisdom fine!

*

Lover, Love, idol, deceit – what are they?

Who knows of this in Kaaba and temple, pray?

Come into the garden and see the unity in colour;

Ponder the lover, Beloved, rose and thorn.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to you on this

Meeting with the Beloved!

Congratulations, O Saqi,

The cup and wine, celebrate!

By the river's edge a thousand lights

Are lit.

The lover's lips, the lips of the cup

Let's celebrate!

O most beautiful on this earth

That my fortune to me denied!

O fairy angel,

Your enchanting ways I celebrate!

Never mind, O Saqi,

That thou hast no wine or cup!

Let your intoxicating

Eyes roam and captivate!

You sit on the throne

Of eternity, since before time.

May you, *Sarmad*,

This treasure of Love enjoy.

SULTAN BAHU

(*c. AD 1628–91; c. AH 1037–1102*)

Sultan Bahu ranks amongst the greatest Sufi poets of Punjab. Together with Bulleh Shah and the eighteenth-century poet Varis Shah (*fl.* 1766), Sultan Bahu is a household name wherever Punjabi is spoken.

Greatly influenced by the ideas of Mohyuddin Ibn ‘Arabi and Mansur Hallaj, his poetry constantly questions orthodoxy and literal, legalistic interpretations of Islam. Regarded as a saint, he was a Sufi in the Qadria order and a prolific writer on Sufism.

Sultan Bahu’s verses are sung all over Pakistan and India by qawwali and [kafi](#) singers, and his shrine in Garh Maharaja in Punjab, Pakistan, is a place of pilgrimage where an annual festival is held with great fervour.

UNION WITH GOD

I am no accomplished scholar,

Nor a judge, nor doctor of law;

My heart neither hell desires,

Nor my soul to heaven aspires.

I do not fast as required,

Nor am I the pure, praying kind.

All I want is union with God,

I care not for the false or true.

LOVE'S DISEASE

They're not Hindu or Muslim.

They do not pray in mosque or temple.

Yet they receive the Light of God

And are immersed in beautiful visions.

These madmen are truly sane.

They are lost in God's domain.

I would give my life for these

Who are blessed with Love's disease!

WHERE GOD IS

God is not up there, my friends,

Nor in the Kaaba does He reside;

He is not in learned books,

Nor inside the minaret He hides.

He is not in Ganga, Jamuna,

Nor He in Benaras abides.¹

Don't get lost in searching for Him.

Find yourself a truthful guide!

THE HEART IS A RIVER

The heart's a river deeper than the sea.

Who can within its deepest secret see?

In the heart are storms and waves

And ships that have sunk without trace;

In the heart are lit the lamps

That rival the heavenly stars!

He who dwells in the heart's domain

Will for ever with the Lord remain!

THE CERTAIN HEART

That heart is special amongst hearts

Who is free of suspicion and doubt,

Free of plenty and free of drought,

Indifferent to the good and great.

The heart is a miracle of body and soul,

Free of all impure thoughts;

In the company of the Friend,

It's full of light where darkness ends!

BELIEF

Belief and worldly desire, twin sisters, *Bahu*;

[Sharia](#) forbids it: you cannot marry the two.

Think about it, O you wise,

How can fire and water compromise?

That scholar is indeed dishonest

Who tries to have both of these.

THE HEART'S RIVER

The heart's river is deeper than the sea.

Dive in searcher, find the pearl!

That soul which has not drunk of this

Is in constant thirst, alas!

With reflection and absorption,

Hope for union stays alive.

That guide is worse than a fallen woman

Who is full of falsity and lies!

SIGH OF THE AFFLICTED

The sigh of the afflicted turns mountain stones

To fall like autumn leaves.

The sigh of the afflicted makes the poisonous snakes

Shudder and hide.

The sigh of the afflicted makes stars

Rain down from the skies.

But the sigh of the afflicted

Is the Lover's friend and He knows.

THE TRUE KALIMAH

Anyone can have the [Kalimah](#) on his tongue,

But no one has it in his heart!

The Lovers read the word of Love

And soar in the heavens above.

When my Friend made me recite

The words of faith,

I was forever saved!

BABA BULLEH SHAH

(AD 1680–1757; AH 1090–1170)

Baba Bulleh Shah, whose real name was Abdullah Shah, is counted among the foremost Punjabi Sufi poets, along with Varis Shah, Sultan Bahu and Shah Hussain (1538–99). He was born in Bahawalpur and died in Kasur, both in Pakistan.

Baba Bulleh Shah served as a pupil of the Sufi teacher Inayat Shah Qadri (*d.* 1728). In this way, he accumulated knowledge of the Qur'an, the Arabic and Persian languages, and mystic ideology. The exact number of poems Baba Bulleh Shah composed is unknown, with estimates ranging from 50 to 250, but his writing consists largely of poems written in the kafi style.

BULLEH, WHO KNOWS WHO I AM?

Not a believer in the mosque am I,

Nor a disbeliever with his rites am I.

I am not the pure amongst the impure,

Neither Moses nor Pharaoh am I.

Bulleh, who knows who I am?

Not in the holy books am I,

Nor do I dwell in [bhang](#) or wine,

Nor do I live in a drunken haze,

Nor in sleep nor waking known.

Bulleh, who knows who I am?

Not in happiness or in sorrow am I found.

I am neither pure nor mired in filthy ground.

Neither made from earth nor water,

Nor am I in air or fire to be found.

Bulleh, who knows who I am?

Not an Arab nor Lahori,

Not a Hindi or Nagouri,

Nor a Muslim or Peshawari,

Not a Buddhist or a Christian.

Bulleh, who knows who I am?

Secrets of religion have I not unravelled,

Nor have I fathomed Eve and Adam.

Neither still nor moving on,

I have not chosen my own name!

Bulleh, who knows who I am?

From first to last, I searched myself.

None other did I succeed in knowing.

Not some great thinker am I.

Who is standing in my shoes, alone?

Bulleh, who knows who I am?

YOU ALONE EXIST

You alone exist; I do not, O Beloved!

You alone exist, I do not!

Like the shadow of a house in ruins,

I revolve in my own mind.

If I speak, you speak with me:

If I am silent, you are in my mind.

If I sleep, you sleep with me:

If I walk, you are along my path.

Oh *Bulleh*, the spouse has come to my house:

My life is a sacrifice unto Him.

You alone exist; I do not, O Beloved!

IT'S A TOPSY-TURVY WORLD!

The crow attacks the hawk.

Sparrows swoop on eagles.

It's a topsy-turvy world!

The stallion is rejected.

The donkey is accepted.

It's a topsy-turvy world!

Paupers walk like kings.

And kings beg on the streets.

It's a topsy-turvy world!

Says *Bulleh*,

Throw away your pride,

Let go of ego,

Forget yourself for once,

Then only you will find Him!

ONE POINT CONTAINS ALL

One point contains all;

Learn about the One, forget the rest.

Forget hell and the terrible grave;

Leave the ways of sin and purify

Your heart.

That's how the argument is spun:

It's all contained in One!

Why rub your head against the earth?

What point in your vain prostration?

Your Kalimah read, makes others laugh.

You do not grasp the Lord's word!

Somewhere the truth is written down:

It's all contained in One!

Some go to the jungle in vain

And starve and cause themselves some pain;

They waste their time with all this

And come home tired, nothing gained!

Find your master and become God's slave.

In this way you'll be free of care;

Free of desire, free of worry,

And your heart truthful, pure.

Bulleh has discovered this truth alone:

It's all contained in One!

HE WHO IS STRICKEN BY LOVE

He who is stricken by Love

Sings and dances out of tune.

He who wears the garb of Love

Gets blessings from above.

Soon as he drinks from this cup

No questions and no answers remain.

He who is stricken by Love

Sings and dances out of tune.

He who has the Beloved in his heart,

He is fulfilled with his Love.

No need he has for formality,

He just enjoys his ecstasy.

He who is stricken by Love

Sings and dances out of tune.

LOVE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Love springs eternal!

When I learnt the lesson of Love

I dreaded going to the mosque.

Hesitantly, I found a temple

Where they beat a thousand drums.

Love springs eternal! Come!

I am tired of reading holy books,

Fed up with prostrations good.

God is not in [Mathura](#) or Mecca.

He who finds Him is enlightened!

Love springs eternal! Come!

Burn the prayer mat, break the beaker!

Quit the rosary, chuck the staff!

Lovers shout at the top of their voices:

Break all rules that tie you down!

Love springs eternal! Come!

Heer and *Ranjha*¹ are united:

While she searches for him in orchards,

He is in her warm embrace!

She has her love, she is fulfilled!

Love springs eternal! Come!

IT IS YOU ALONE

It is you alone.

Not I, my love.

You are; I'm not.

Shadow-like you haunt my mind

And I am lost in you.

When I speak, you speak with me,

And when I am silent so are you.

When I sleep, you sleep with me,

And when I walk, you walk with me.

Bulleh's Master has come home

And he is devoted fully.

It is you alone.

Not I, my love.

You are

And I'm not!

FASTING, PILGRIMAGE, PRAYER

Fasting, pilgrimage, prayer –

In love, I have forgotten all!

As soon as news of love arrived,

Forgot all logic, all form,

And gave up daily chores;

Fasting, pilgrimage, prayer –

In love, I have forgotten all!

When my Beloved entered my abode

I abandoned religion's code.

He dwells in every creed

Whose presence is everywhere,

Yet the common folk

See Him not, and are unaware.

Fasting, pilgrimage, prayer –

In love, I have forgotten all!

MY LORD COMES AS MAN

My Lord has come as man.

Himself the deer,

Himself the tiger,

Himself the hunted

And the hunter.

He is the master.

He the slave.

He is the trader.

He the buyer.

My Lord has come as man.

The player plays

A strange game,

Makes me dance

A puppet in His hands;

I dance at His clapping

To the tune that

He has chosen.

My Lord has come as man!

THE GOD YOU FIND

The God that you find,

While wandering in the jungle,

Is found by fish and fowl and beast.

O foolish mankind!

Bulleh Shah! Only they find

The true God

Who are good and pure in heart!

LOOK INTO YOURSELF

You have learnt so much

And read a thousand books.

Have you ever read your Self?

You have gone to mosque and temple.

Have you ever visited your soul?

You are busy fighting Satan.

Have you ever fought your

Ill intentions?

You have reached into the skies,

But you have failed to reach

What's in your heart!

DESTROY THE MOSQUE AND TEMPLE!

Destroy the mosque!

Destroy the temple!

Destroy whatever you please.

Do not break the human heart,

For God Dwells therein!

SHAH ABDUL LATIF BHITTAI

(*AD 1689–1752; AH 1100–65*)

A contemporary of Baba Bulleh Shah, the Sufi scholar and saint Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai settled in the town of Bhit Shah in Sindh, Pakistan.

He is considered one of the greatest poets in the Sindhi language, although much of his work was transmitted orally. There is, however, a famous collection of his verses, the *Shah Jo Risalo*.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's shrine is located in Bhit and attracts hundreds of pilgrims every day.

PEACE

I

The One Creator, the all great;

Lord of the universe –

The living, the original;

Ruler with power innate;

The giver, the sustainer,

the unique, compassionate;

This master praise, to Him alone

thyself in praise prostrate...

The generous, who does create

the universe in pairs.

II

None shares His glory, 'He was... is,

shall be'... who this doth say

Accepts Mohammad as 'guide'

with heart and love's true sway;

None from amongst those lost their way

or ever went astray.

III

‘He is without a partner’, when
this glorious news you break –
With love and knowledge, Mohammad
accept... as cause him take.
Why would you then obeisance make
to others after that?

IV

From One, many to being came;
‘Many’ but Oneness is;
Don’t get confounded, Reality
is ‘One’, this truth don’t miss
– Commotions vast display – all this,
I vow, of Loved-one is.

V

The Echo and the call are same,
if you sound’s secret knew –
They both were one, but two became
only when ‘hearing’ came.

VI

A thousand doors and windows too,

the palace has... but see,

Wherever I might go or be

My master confronts me there.

VII

If you have learnt to long, by pain

be not distressed –

Secret of love's sorrow must be

never confessed –

Suffering is by the heart caressed,

and there it is preserved.

VIII

The poison-drinking lovers, lured

by poison sweet, drink more and more;

To bitterness of fatal cup,

the poison-drinkers are inured,

Though wounds are festering, and uncured,

no whisper to the vulgar goes.

IX

All from Beloved's side is sweet

whate'er He gives to you.

There is no bitter, if you knew

the secret how to taste.

Elsa Kazi

THEY HAVE READ AND READ

They read and read, but what they read

in their hearts refuse to store –

The more they pages turn, the more

are deeply steeped in sin.

O friend, why are you still inclined

to waste paper and ink? –

Go rather forth and try to find

the source where words were formed.

The world with 'I' doth overflow

and with it flaunts about –

But its own 'Self' it doth not know...

'Tis a magician's spell.

They do not heed the glorious line

that does begin with A –

In vain they look for the Divine,

though page on page they turn.

Read only the letter A –

all other pages put aside –

Book-reading nothing will convey –

but your being purify.

Unuttered is unknown... The uttered

is never understood... Behold,

Although it be as true as gold,

humanity never takes note.

Elsa Kazi

YOU PROFESS TO BE FAITHFUL

You profess to be a 'faithful',

Holy maxims you recite...

But your heart deceit is hiding

Duality – satanic spite –

Faithful outward, you delight

in idolat'ries inside.

Elsa Kazi

THE BODY IS A ROSARY

The body is a rosary,

the mind a bead, a harp the heart.

Love-strings are playing there the theme

of unity in every part;

The nerves do chant: 'There's none like thee;

the "One" and only one thou art.'

E'en in sleeping, beauty they impart,

their very sleep their worship is!

Elsa Kazi

*SOHNI*¹

I

Currents have their velocity,
rivers their speed possess –
But where there's love, a different rush
its currents do express,
And those that love fathomlessness,
are steeped in depth of thought.

II

Master the lesson thoroughly
that law doth teach *Sohni* –
Then contemplate and meditate
till 'truth' comes near to thee –
But 'Reality's Vision' will be
reward of lovers true.

Elsa Kazi

CREATION

I

When 'Be' was not yet said, nor was
there flesh-bone scheme or plan;
When Adam had not yet received
his form, was not yet man;
Then my relationship began,
my recognition too.

II

'Am I not thy Lord?' came a voice;
a voice so sweet and clear;
And I said: 'Yes' with all my heart
when I this voice did hear;
And with a bond I did adhere
that moment to my love.

III

Ere God created souls, by saying,
'Be', all one they were;
Together were they – and behold
my kinship started there –

I still this recognition bear

with thee, Beloved mine.

Elsa Kazi

SHAH NIAZ

(*AD 1742–1834; AH 1155–1250*)

Shah Niaz was a Sufi saint in the Naqshbandi order whose poetry reflects the idea of *Wahdatul Wujud* (Unity of Being) of Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi.

Born in Sirhind in Punjab, Shah Niaz wrote poetry in Persian, Urdu and Hindi and he is a very popular poet amongst the Sufis of the South Asian subcontinent. Even today, his poems are often sung in *sama* or qawwali gatherings all over India and Pakistan.

THE FACE OF BEAUTY

The face of each beauty is the reflection of His face;

The fragrance and colour of each garden are His.

In every heart and soul, the search for Him alone;

Every tongue and every mind, His thought adorns.

The goal of every creed and religion is His abode;

He is the ultimate aim of every sect and nation.

In the Kaaba, in the church and in the temple,

The worshippers are entranced by His eyes.

THOUGH I AM BURIED

Though I'm buried in the dust

I yearn for the Beloved, as I must;

Love has gone, yet its pain still hurts.

The spark of Love did my being set afire,

The ashes smoulder still with Your desire!

Everything is but illusion, like a mirage;

I know I do not exist, yet the doubt persists.

I need none to say a prayer at my grave;

After me, my Love is there to pray.

I DRANK FROM THE SAQI'S EYES

I drank from the Saqi's wine-filled eyes,

Bid goodbye to name and fame,

Reason and sanity the ultimate price!

Cast my purity, my chastity,

At that beloved idol's feet;

My religion is love,

Drunkenness, passion sweet.

To serve the Pir, my guide,

Is my duty and my pride;

I am but a mere slave

Amongst his many attendant slaves!

I SAW MY BELOVED IN EVERY GUISE

I saw my Beloved in every guise,
Sometimes hidden, sometimes apparent,
Sometimes as a possibility, others as a certainty,
Sometimes as passing, sometimes eternal,
Sometimes he called out, 'Am I not?'
Sometimes a slave, others a Lord,
Sometimes he was indifferent, distant,
Sometimes like a close friend,
Sometimes he appeared as a king on his throne,
Sometimes a beggar without a home.
Sometimes he was a puritan and chaste,
Sometimes like a drunk in tavern sat,
Sometimes he was a dancer or a singer,
Sometimes an instrument playing a tune,
Sometimes he came in the guise of a Beloved,
Enticing, beautiful and proud.
Sometimes like the Lover, *Niaz*,
I saw him wretched and forlorn!

NOT-BEING

Not-being is being, friends;

And existence is nothing, friends.

Selflessness is drunkenness

And drunkenness is nothing, friends.

Nothing is everything and everything nothing, friends.

Real worship of Truth is to be nothing

And this nothing is the real Truth!

MIAN MUHAMMAD BAKSH

(d. AD 1907; AH 1324)

Mian Muhammad Baksh was born in a village in the Mirpur District of Kashmir. Indeed, he is regarded by many Kashmiris as the Rumi of Kashmir.

Mian Muhammad's most famous book of poetry, *Saiful Muluk* (1863), is not only read but sung at shrines and wherever Kashmiris are to be found. In fact, the reciters of *Saiful Muluk* have developed a special style of singing the verses.

Mian Muhammad also wrote many Sufi romances, notably *Sohni Mahiwal* (*Sohni and Mahiwal*) and *Mirza Sahiban* (*Mirza and Sahiban*). His poetry is written in a dialect of Punjabi and utilizes a rich vocabulary of Persian and Arabic words.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE AND LOVERS

Those whom Love has chosen as its friend

Remain at peace with this affliction to the very end.

They happily scorn the throne and embrace the thorn,

They rejoice in their Love that has left them forlorn.

Quietly they sip the poisoned wine of Love's sorrow,

Never afraid of what pain awaits them tomorrow.

In memory of their Beloved they suffer any pain

And drink the wine of sorrow happily from their Beloved's hands.

Those who have become entranced with their Beloved's beauty

Have no desire to be free or remove their chains.

None knows the state of their troubled soul and who to blame;

They are full of the anguish of the moth, but present themselves as the lighted flame!

On the outside they are dark, but inside carry light;

Their lips look dry with thirst, yet they bathe in springs of life.

They search far and wide, yet within them the Beloved hides;

They look deaf and dumb and blind, yet in their words meaning resides.

They embrace their Beloved day and night yet remain unsatisfied;

They cry floods of tears and remain unappeased.

They who are in love know no respite nor peace nor rest;

They stare in sleep and awakening at their Beloved's face.

Their belief in their love consumes them wholly and completely;

Without it nothing seems attractive, neither bazaar nor garden.

Unafraid and unashamed, they openly their love proclaim;

Those who are with love afflicted care not for fame or name!

If the Beloved demands their heart, they offer it with grace;

If the Beloved wants their life, they give it up in haste.

Immersed in Love for the only one, they forget the whole world;

They cry their life away in yearning for the Beloved One.

Carrying the one Beloved in their hearts they roam town and wilderness;

Learned doctors find no cure for their healthy, incurable sickness.

Outwardly they are dust and broken twigs; inwardly they are fire!

But their cry of passion could bring down the mountain if they so desire!

Like the wind they roam across kingdoms, never to be seen;

They are silent yet spread their fragrance far and wide, like the jasmine.

Consumed by contemplation of their Beloved, unaware,

They know not East or West, nor night or day.

Oblivious of the two worlds, they care for nothing at all;

Like *Heer* who found her *Ranjha*¹ and shed her burdens all.

He that has stated 'I am closer to you' is here within you,

While you're searching far and wide for Him who is True!

The heart that's devoid of Love is worse than guard dogs

Who, despite being hungry and weak, remain forever loyal.

Without Love all the praying and chastity are vain,

Until you burn with Love, you'll not know friendship.

Those who do not have the sickness of Love will never taste the fruit of vision.

If you fall sick with the Love of God, no need for any cure.

He who is slain with this sword, he is a martyr!

He who dies for Love lives forever and hereafter!

He who has earned Love's grace is indeed a special person;

Unless you reach this secret place, you are not really human.

The robe and recitation are vain, unless there's light inside;

Unless Love burns your soul, these outward signs are of no use.

Swords may flash and arrows rain, the lover is fearless.

O Muhammad Baksh, Love and restraint never go together.

He never reveals Love's secret to another, no matter what
Abuse and indignity one suffers, nor what calamity befalls.

If you want to be a lover, grab hold of your Beloved's hem,
And if she so desires give up your life and limb right there and then.

The body only goes to heaven when it dresses up in death;
In the hope of meeting the Beloved, bear hell and death as necessary.

The lover is never hopeless, with every passing day,
He can be told off a hundred times, but will not go away.

If you desire the way of love, remove all doubt and fear.

Be hopeful and positive and your goal is very near!

Always be patient and thankful for God's grace.

There is no other Giver but He and no other door but His.

Even if He removes thee from the throne and makes you a prisoner,

O Muhammad Baksh, you will have to plead with Him in the end.

THE VALLEY OF UNITY OR ONENESS

Then comes a valley that is the valley of ONENESS.

The worshipped meets the worshipper, the Pir and Murid are ONE.

Thousands of heads joined together, come out of one collar;

It's so tight that not even a grain of sand can pass through.

The pre-eternal and eternal are both the garments, and this collar is in-between;

Each one, however, takes its form from the same Master.

He that has not drowned in the river of Unity

May look human, but is not a man.

He who reaches Oneness goes beyond good and bad;

Good and bad are just ways of seeing.

As man reaches into himself and makes a place,

Sometimes in happiness he laughs, at others, cries in misery.

Once he comes out of himself, he's neither happy nor sad,

From both hell's sorrow and heaven's delight he's free.

Each man has in his ego hell's snakes and scorpions,

But as he leaves his Self behind, he's free of all dangers.

Come out of Self, else carry that hell with you,

And be bitten by the snakes and scorpions of pain.

When the searcher reaches here, he dies and lives again;

He disappears and appears again as deaf and dumb and blind.

Reason roams outside this city and cannot enter;

Anyone who discovers this mystery is free of care.

He leaves all reason behind and dances wildly

And says he does not know who he is and where he goes.

If you leave your ego behind and forget your Self,

That is the place of Oneness!

O Muhammad Baksh, who can describe it in mere words?

GLOSSARY

- Alif** The Arabic letter *alif* is equivalent to the letter *A* in the English alphabet. It is also the first letter of 'Allah'.
- Azrail** The angel of death.
- Baqa** Eternal existence in the consciousness of God.
- Bhakti** A devotional Hindu movement.
- Bhang** A concoction of a hashish-like drug.
- Dervishes** Sufi mystics.
- Divan** A collection of ghazals.
- Elast** A covenant between God and all human souls, when God asked, 'Do you not recognize your Lord?' and the souls answered, 'Yes.'
- Fana** Annihilation of Self.
- Fatiha** The short first *sura* of the Qu'ran, used by Muslims as an essential element of ritual prayer. Also used in the context of a prayer for departed souls.
- Ghazal** A classical love lyric found in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish and many other languages.
- Ghazi** A warrior for the faith.
- Gnostic** One who has mystical knowledge of Truth or God. Specifically, in Sufism, one who has the *Ilm-e-Ma'rifat* (Knowledge of Truth), known as an *A'rif*.
- Hadiths** A collection of Islamic traditions containing the sayings of the prophet Muhammad.
- Hajj** The annual pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the pillars of Islamic faith. All Muslims are expected to make this pilgrimage at least once, if they can afford to do so.
- Houri** A beautiful young woman, especially one of the virgin companions of the faithful in the Muslim paradise.

Iblis Satan.

Kaaba A square building in Mecca, the site most holy to Muslims, containing a sacred black stone.

Kafi A musical form or a poem in musical form.

Kalimah ('the phrase') The declaration of faith of all Muslims: 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is God's Messenger.'

Khanqah A Sufi hospice, usually attached to a Sufi shrine.

Leila The Beloved of Majnun.

Madrasah A college for Islamic instruction.

Majnun (meaning 'possessed') The archetypal romantic hero, as immortalized in Ganjavi's *The Story of Layla and Majnun*.

Masnavi A narrative poem in rhyming couplets.

Mathura A holy city in India, said to be the birthplace of the Hindu deity Krishna.

Mazar Tomb.

Murid Disciple or follower of a particular Sufi master or saint.

Mustafa ('The Holy One') A name for the Prophet.

Namaz The ritual prayer practised by Muslims in supplication to God.

Pandit Hindu scholar.

Pir Spiritual guide.

Qalandars A fringe order of wandering Sufis who advocated the consumption of hashish.

Qasidah A panegyric.

Qawwali Indian/Pakistani Sufi music and musical form, which originated around the

shrines and is now a very popular form of music all over the subcontinent.

Qazi A learned jurist or judge.

Qiblah The direction of the holy Kaaba in Mecca, to which Muslims turn when at prayer.

Qur'an The Islamic sacred book, believed to be the word of God as dictated to Muhammad and written down in Arabic.

Qutub The highest form of master in Sufism; a sheikh who provides a focus for spiritual teachings.

Rabab A stringed instrument, plucked like a lute or played with a bow.

Rubai Quatrain.

Saqi The Wine-giver; it also alludes to a spiritual guide or God.

Sharia Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadiths.

Sura A chapter of the Qur'an.

'Typal' love A love that acts as a bridge between illusory (temporal) love and True (spiritual) love.

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1. The four letters spell 'Allah'.

1. E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 261, quoting H. Ethé.

1. Temples.

1. The poet refers to himself by the nom de plume Pir Ansar.

1. A princely hero.

1. A reference to God's reply to David, 'I was a Hidden Treasure.' See the Introduction, p. [XXV](#).

1. Ancient Arab tribe.

2. Persian devils.

1. Qu'ran 53: 10–16.

1. A reference to the story of the Prophet hiding in a narrow cave, the entrance to which was quickly covered by a spider's web; this persuaded his pursuers that he was not inside.
2. The *Miraj* or night journey, when the Prophet was taken into the heavens by angels (seeing Jesus, Moses and Abraham on the way) and received a revelation of what Muslims believe.
3. Waisa and Ramin and Wamiq and Azra are lovers from legend and romance.

1. A reference to Ali ibn Abi Talib (600–61), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. He is regarded as the fourth and final Rightly Guided Caliph by Sunni Muslims, whereas for Shia Muslims he is the Prophet's first true successor.
2. An ancient Persian hero.

3. Uthman ibn 'Affan (c. 579–656), a companion of the Prophet, was the third Rightly Guided Caliph of Islam.
4. The hoopoe, a salmon-pink bird, took a letter from Solomon to the Queen of Sheba (Qur'an 27:20–44).

1. Qur'an 93:1.

2. A reference to the wine of *Elast*.

3. References to the Sun are to Shamsuddin Tabrizi, Rumi's friend and Sufi master.

1. Two famous Sufis from Baghdad.
2. Fariduddin Attar, the renowned Sufi poet who preceded Rumi.
3. Mansur Hallaj, the Muslim martyr, who was put to death for declaring 'I am the Truth.'

1. Qur'an 76:21.

2. Qur'an 17:110.

1. Literally, a beggar, but here used to mean someone with real spiritual knowledge and humility.

1. Qur'an 62:5.

1. Qur'an 114:4.

2. Qur'an 32:18.

1. Qur'an 10:25.

1. Qur'an 54:50.

2. Qur'an 20:40.

1. A beauty spot on the Beloved's face.

1. Qur'an 53:18.

2. Qur'an 55:26.

3. Qur'an 76:21.

1. Qur'an 17:46.

2. Qur'an 6:91.

3. Qur'an 67:3.

1. A place in Central Asia famous for its musk deer.

1. A chaste and vain puritan.

1. *La* ('no') and *Illa* ('but') refer to the Kalimah.

1. Qur'an 57:4.

1. A kind of mascara made from the wick of a lamp.

2. Leila, Majnun, Shirin and Ferhad are all lovers from legend and romance.

3. 'All things shall pass away, except His face' (Qur'an 28:88).

1. Sacred places of worship for Hindus.

1. Legendary lovers.

1. A tragic heroine in Sindhi romance.

1. Legendary lovers.

