



A YEAR WITH
HAFIZ



DAILY
CONTEMPLATIONS

DANIEL LADINSKY

Author of *THE GIFT* and *LOVE POEMS FROM GOD*

Though Hafiz lived in the fourteenth century, his poems are still immensely popular. His wisdom, his expressive language and his deep reverence for beauty have made him a favorite poet of lovers, and especially of lovers of God. Here Daniel Ladinsky explores with learned insight and a delicate hand Hafiz's exquisite verses. He presents 365 poignant poems—including a section based on the translations of Hafiz by Ralph Waldo Emerson—that capture a spirit of infinite tenderness and compassion, of great exuberance, joy and laughter, of ecstatic love and fervent longing, and of wonder and delight at the divine splendor of the universe. As Ladinsky says of his renderings, "The wings of some of these poems just could not resist unfurling, breaking out of conventional space and cultural-bound time, hoping to lift many in the wake of their freedom."

PENGUIN BOOKS
A YEAR WITH HAFIZ

HAFIZ, whose given name was Shams-ud-din Muhammad (c. 1320–1389), is the most beloved poet of Persians. He was born and lived in Shiraz, a beautiful garden city, where he became a famous spiritual teacher. His *Divan* (collected poems) is a classic in the literature of Sufism and mystical verse. The work of Hafiz became known to the West largely through the passion of Goethe. His enthusiasm deeply affected Ralph Waldo Emerson, who then translated Hafiz in the nineteenth century. Emerson said, "Hafiz is a poet for poets," and Goethe remarked, "Hafiz has no peer." Hafiz's poems were also admired by such diverse notables as Nietzsche and Arthur Conan Doyle, whose wonderful character Sherlock Holmes quotes Hafiz; García Lorca praised him; the famous composer Johannes Brahms was so touched by his verse he put several lines into compositions; and even Queen Victoria was said to have consulted the works of Hafiz in times of need. The range of Hafiz's verse is indeed stunning. He says, "I am a hole in a flute that the Christ's breath moves through—listen to this music." In another poem Hafiz playfully sings, "Look at the smile on the earth's lips this morning, she lay again with me last night."

DANIEL LADINSKY is one of the most successful living writers in the world working with poetry. His work has reached millions of people. Daniel lived in India for six years, where he worked in a rural clinic free to the poor, and was a student of the essence and unity of all faiths. A teacher there ingrained the wonder of Hafiz into his soul when he said, "With great wit and tenderness the words of Hafiz speak for God." Ladinsky's other books include *The Gift*, *Love Poems from God*, *The Subject Tonight Is Love*, *I Heard God Laughing*, and an upcoming Rumi book, *The Purity of Desire*. Once, when Daniel was asked a reason for his accomplishments and if he had any advice for other artists, Daniel quoted a line from an old Broadway musical that went, "You gotta have heart, miles and miles and miles of heart!"

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ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my teacher, Eruch Jessawala, with whom I spent a lot of time over a twenty-year period. I think he knew Hafiz intrinsically, more truly and deeply than anyone I have ever met. Not one poem of mine would ever have been published without his extraordinary sanction and a profound, rare insight he revealed to me about my work. And I thank his decades-old little bamboo walking stick—that *Zen's master's baton*—that I *journeyed* next to for hundreds of miles in India. It lays across my computer as I write. I think my every word leans against it and upon Eruch, in many ways. For he is now the hub of me, and I a spoke he moves.

Nancy Barton, an old friend and now my agent, made a fantastic contribution to this book in many ways. Carolyn Carlson, my wonderful editor of nearly a decade . . . hey, looks like we finally got this out—a glass click and big smooch.

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PREFACE

RALPH WALDO EMERSON,
A PSYCHIATRIST I KNOW,
AND MY PORTRAIT OF HAFIZ

They took a little walk on the wild side, they even got a bit outrageous, some of these Hafiz renderings. Their wings could not resist unfurling, breaking out of conventional space and cultural-bound time, hoping to lift many in the wake of their freedom. How did that ever happen? Well, truth is—the gods probably had all these poems up their sleeves way before I was born. My bucket just drew them from a well. And I think Hafiz would stand behind my artistic license with his work, moreover encourage it, as I feel so much of the *original* has been lost. And whatever can make us more sane and *organic*, perhaps aid in discerning the real, I feel a duty to offer. No holds barred, to me, is rule number one in poetry, and in all true art or service that cares only to comfort and inspire. An at times *healthy lawlessness*, can be just that, something a wise angel prescribes. Which to my mind translates into verses like—Moses and the Pinup Girl and Spiritual La-La Land ... making a debut. Some wanted me to take Moses and his sweetheart out of this book. But hell, Hafiz only cared about love. And I feel he gave my pen a wink.

Helpful I hope these poems are, and there is seriousness here. I have wept over many of these poems as they explored theological heights and mixed with our heart's beautiful, everyday emotions. The common is applauded and revealed as sacred. There is wonderful wit in some lines. The playful is turned loose and so is intelligence. The hallmark of Hafiz is to create a bond with his reader, and then offer his hand, when one might most need it. Hafiz was a true master in

every sense of the word. A dear friend to any in spiritual need. Only the remarkable can do justice to him. I feel one has to take great liberties, at times, from some prevailing scholarly views of Hafiz to accomplish that; one's work then becomes controversial and vulnerable to criticism. What to do? So-called scholarship in regards to Hafiz can, it seems to me, greatly compromise his spirit and make him appear far less than I have seen and know he is.

Some have suggested I call my poems "Hafiz inspired" rather than "versions" or "renderings." That word *inspired* has always seemed a *step up*, if you will, for it in part means "breathed into by the divine." Well, all that seems so intimate and private, but maybe that is exactly what happened, and now I am just trying to exhale light—some gods or God, the soul of Hafiz—onto the page the best I can.

RALPH & TECHNICAL INFO

Most of the poems in this book have not been published before. Included here are the first of my renderings based on the translations of Hafiz by Ralph Waldo Emerson. It was British orientalist, Sir William Jones (1746–1794), who first pioneered English translations of Hafiz and other notable Persian poets into European literary culture. It was Emerson though, who offered the earliest translations of Hafiz to the world via an American pen. Emerson's Hafiz translations appear to have been made entirely from German sources. They were primarily created working from a collection of Hafiz's poems that was published in 1812 by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. Hammer-Purgstall's work had inspired Goethe to translate Hafiz in his famous *West-östlicher Divan*. Emerson read Goethe's versions and was deeply moved by them. Emerson was also an earnest student of a wide variety of books of Eastern philosophy, religion, history, and poetry. In the spring of 1846, Emerson purchased Hammer-Purgstall's Hafiz translations from the bookstore of his friend, Elizabeth Peabody. She was a colleague of his in the Transcendentalist movement. In subsequent years Hafiz became a life-long companion to Emerson and deeply influenced his remaining literary career. Emer-

son's journals clearly testify to this. Hafiz was apparently the personification of a human being and poet to him. For Emerson wrote, "He fears nothing. He sees too far, he sees throughout; such is the only man I wish to see or be." And Emerson gave Hafiz that wonderful, famous compliment when he said, "Hafiz is a poet for poets."

In many of the poems Emerson translated, he appears to have clearly collaborated upon, expanded, and even re-created Hafiz's verse. Of this sort of top-end literary tampering, Sir William Jones, who was considered a linguistic genius, said of *his own* paraphrased translations, in his *A Grammar of the Persian Language* (W. and J. Richardson, London, 1771), "When the learner is able to understand the images and allusions in the Persian poems, he will see a reason in every line why they cannot be translated literally into any European language."

Some extraordinary, thorough scholarship has been done regarding Emerson's Hafiz work. The most impressive I have come across is *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Volume 2, edited by Ronald A. Bosco, with the chief editor being Ralph H. Orth (University of Missouri Press, 1993). Also, the book titled *Emerson: Collected Poems & Translations* published by the Library of America (1994) is another wonderful source of Emerson's work with Hafiz and other Persian and historic poets. According to these two sources, Emerson worked on more than one hundred poems of Hafiz, with several of those poems appearing incomplete, or *still in progress*. I hope I have added to that *progress*.

Emerson passed away on April 27, 1882. In honor of Emerson's remarkable endorsement—imprimatur—of Hafiz, I have devoted the entire month of April to Emerson's translations. I freely collaborated on Emerson's Hafiz poems, often trying to complete fragments of translations he left. Thus the poems in April are Hafiz-Hammer-Emerson-Ladinsky poems. Wow, what a unique lineage, but perhaps the best one can do at the moment to continue to bring rightful attention to one of the priceless literary and spiritual treasures of the world.

A PSYCHIATRIST I KNOW

I have a friend who is a practicing psychiatrist and she was an admirer of my work before we ever met. Of all the people I have spent time with, she is the deepest into Buddhist meditation and yoga. And at my request she sent me a month's worth of my Hafiz poems for this book. Her selections, she felt, most spoke to and could aid the intelligent heart, mind, and soul. Those selections, "from her professional understanding," could most benefit the psychological and spiritual *needs* of some of the thousands who each day visit professionals like herself, especially around the holidays. An interesting sanction, to my mind, of the poems she picked, and her involvement, was this: That literally within five minutes of my first asking her to contribute to this book . . . she sent me some 30 poems by email. I of course asked her how she could have possibly gotten those poems back to me so quickly and with so much apparent thought and insight. She replied, "I knew you were going to ask me to send those, so here they are." She had just returned from a whole week of intensive meditation in the mountains; maybe she got zapped by a satori or two and had a new radar system installed. Maybe we should go to her for treatment, or at least start meditating more. Her selections comprise the entries offered in November. In case things get especially rough over the holidays—or on any days—dip your cup in that Thanksgiving month, a *spiked punch bowl* served by a doctor who might cruise around in the Buddha's belly.

MY PORTRAIT OF HAFIZ

Besides the significant essay that follows this preface, "Releasing the Spirit of Hafiz" (first published in 1996), I would suggest that any who might be interested in more of the background and foundation of my working with Hafiz read "My Portrait of Hafiz"—via a reader's review I posted on Amazon.com for my book, *The Gift*. You should be able to easily find the review by simply *googling* "My Portrait of Hafiz," and following that a bit. That review essay is dated April 18, 2005. Also, I feel if Carl Jung were alive and I could have told him

two astounding dreams/visions I have had of Hafiz in regards to my work, I bet Carl would have written a marvelous blurb.

A great thanks to any who support my work. My life has become these poems and books. May something in them touch you as only a real lover and friend can.

—DANIEL LADINSKY

JULY 10, 2011

P.S. A category-three *Marital Warning* (if it is not too late) from Rudyard Kipling, via some playful Hafiz sentiment that Kipling published in 1886 as "Certain Maxims of Hafiz" (this is maxim XI):

Pleasant the snaffle of courtship, improving the manners and carriage; but the colt (or filly) who is wise will abstain from the terrible thorn-bit of marriage.*

* I added the word *filly* in there; seems I just can't stop tampering with things as they are. And *snaffle* means *a jointed bit, a bridle*.

RELEASING THE SPIRIT OF HAFIZ

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

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

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

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

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

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

I quickly discovered that even in English, a single Hafiz poem, often a single couplet, could be approached from many points of view. A single stanza of Hafiz could generate whole families of independent poems in English, each exploring some aspect of the original. One might call the results "renderings" or renditions of Hafiz, rather than "translations." To "render" an artistic work means to interpret, to express, to realize. The word can also mean "surrendering" and "yielding"—in this case, opening to the guidance of the spirit contained within the poetry. Thus my poems are not "translations" in any traditional sense. They are not intended to be literal or

scholarly or even "accurate." But I hope they are True—faithful to the living spirit of this divine poet.

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

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

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

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

—DANIEL LADINSKY
FEBRUARY 25, 1996

INTRODUCTION

THE LIFE AND WORK OF HAFIZ

HENRY S. MINDLIN

Despite the popularity of Hafiz in the East, reliable information about the details of his life is sketchy. Scholars do not even agree about his dates of birth and death. He was probably born about 1320 and died about 1389, roughly the same dates as the first great poet who wrote in English, Geoffrey Chaucer. His given name was Shams-ud-din Muhammad. He chose the name Hafiz ("memorizer") as a pen name when he began to write poetry; it is a title given to someone who knows the entire Quran by heart, as he apparently did. Hafiz was born in Shiraz, a beautiful city in southern Persia that escaped the ravages of the Mongol and Tartar invasions during this violent and chaotic period of history. He spent nearly all of his life in this cultured garden city.

EARLY LIFE

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

Hafiz did not have an easy or comfortable life. He was the youngest of three sons of poor parents. His father was a coal merchant who died when Hafiz was in his teens. To help support the family, Hafiz worked as a baker's assistant by day and put himself through school

at night, using part of his salary to pay his tuition. Over many years, he mastered the subjects of a "classical" medieval education: Quranic law and theology, grammar, mathematics, and astronomy. He also mastered calligraphy, which in the centuries before printing was a highly refined art form. Islamic calligraphy was originally developed as a sacred art to preserve and glorify the Quran, the message of God. Since representational art was forbidden by religious law, calligraphy reached a remarkable degree of subtlety and expressiveness. Hafiz was a skilled draftsman and occasionally worked as a professional copyist.

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

A POET

A poet is someone
Who can pour light into a cup,
Then raise it to nourish
Your beautiful parched, holy mouth.

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

Hafiz a position a teacher. Thus, during his middle years, he served as a court poet and a college professor. He married and had at least one son.

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

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

SPIRITUAL STUDENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

from a wealthy noble family, and he was a poor baker's assistant. She was beautiful, he was short and physically unattractive—the situation was hopeless.

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

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

At daybreak on the fortieth day, the archangel Gabriel appeared before Hafiz and told him to ask for whatever he wished. Hafiz had never seen such a glorious, radiant being as Gabriel. He found himself thinking, "If God's messenger is so beautiful, how much more beautiful must God be!" Gazing on the unimaginable splendor of God's angel, Hafiz forgot all about the girl, his wish, everything. He said, "I want God!"

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

HAFIZ AND HIS TEACHER

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

The teacher's name was Muhammad Attar. *Attar* signifies a chemist or perfumer, and it is believed that Muhammad Attar owned a shop

in Shiraz and lived a very ordinary public life. Only his small circle of students knew him as a spiritual teacher.

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

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

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

One day, when Hafiz was well over sixty, he confronted his aged teacher and said, "Look at me! I'm old, my wife and son are long dead. What have I gained by being your obedient disciple for all

these years?" Attar gently replied, "Be patient and one day you will know. " Hafiz shouted, "I knew I would get that answer from you!" In a fever of spiritual desperation, he began another form of forty day vigil. This time he drew a circle on the ground and sat within it for forty days and nights, without leaving it for food, drink, or even to relieve himself. On the fortieth day, the angel again appeared to him and asked what he desired. Hafiz discovered that during the forty days all his desires had disappeared. He replied instantly that his only wish was to serve his teacher.

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

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

LEVELS OF LOVE

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

Many of these vignettes about Hafiz have the charming symmetry and precision of symbolic teaching stories. The recurring number forty, for example, might not be meant literally. In spiritual literature, "forty" is often used to indicate a term of learning or change, such as the "forty days and forty nights" of Noah's Flood. Forty is also called "the number of perseverance," marking a period of growth

through testing, trial, and purification. After the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites endured "forty years of wandering" in the wilderness before they were ready to enter the Promised Land. Jesus, following the ancient practice of the prophets, went into the desert for a great seclusion of forty days, which he described as a period of purification and preparation for the next stage of his work. The Buddha attained final enlightenment after forty days of continuous meditation. One can find many examples, East and West.

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

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

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

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

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

This new term of growth (forty years) is exponentially longer than the first one. Attar leads Hafiz through a review of increasingly broader and more encompassing levels of love (a poem a day). Hafiz becomes restless as his love for God grows stronger. Attar constantly counsels "patience" to remind Hafiz

that every stage of love must be fully explored, honored, and lived.

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

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

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

PERFECTION

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

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

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

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

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

MASTER POET

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

Hafiz developed his poetry under the guidance of his teacher. Muhammad Attar reviewed and discussed the poems in his teaching circle, and many of them were set to music. This was a common practice in Sufi schools of the time, including Rumi's order of "whirling dervishes" in Turkey. Poetry and song, easy to memorize and repeat, were used as teaching materials to encapsulate or summarize spiritual principles. With Attar's encouragement, Hafiz perfected this teaching method using a popular form of love song, the *ghazal*. He wrote hundreds of *ghazals*, finding ways to bring new depth and

* "World Teachers such as Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, and Muhammad also exemplify perfection—Personified.

meaning to the lyrics without losing the accustomed association of a love song.

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

All who heard his poetry could easily associate it with their own most cherished experiences of love. The familiar rhythms of the love-song, the *ghazal*, made the poems easy to learn. Before long, his poems were sung all over Persia by people from every walk of life—farmers, craftsmen, scholars, princes, even children.

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

This symbolic language developed gradually over hundreds of years. Hafiz brought it to perfection in his poetry. Even today, people argue about the "true" meaning of his verses—is he simply describ-

ing the joy of walking in the garden or speaking symbolically about God's delight in the material forms of His Creation? Or both? When he praises a wealthy patron or the charms of a young woman, is he really celebrating God, his true Patron and Beloved? Perhaps both. For Hafiz does not see God as separate from the world—wherever there is love, there is the Beloved. The Indian Sufi teacher Inayat Khan explained, "The mission of Hafiz was to express to a fanatical religious world that the presence of God is not to be found only in heaven, but also here on earth."

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

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

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