



Selections
from Saadi's

Gulistan

Translated by
Richard Jeffrey Newman

International Society for Iranian Culture

Erratum for *Gulistan*

The following lines replace the quote from the text at the top of page 14, as well as the last seven lines at the bottom of page 39:

All men and women are to each other
the limbs of a single body, each of us drawn
from life's shimmering essence, God's perfect pearl;
and when this life we share wounds one of us,
all share the hurt as if it were our own.
You, who will not feel another's pain,
no longer deserve to be called human.

Richard Jeffrey Newman

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TRANSLATED BY
RICHARD JEFFREY NEWMAN

Based on the 1888 translation of Edward Rehatsek

Global Scholarly Publications
International Society for Iranian Culture

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*For Maryam and Shabob,
my own rose garden in full bloom.
The scent of love intoxicates me.*

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There are, of course, people I want to thank. First, Iraj Anvar, for thinking of me first, even though the project of producing this book is not the one he thought he was getting me involved in. Mehdi Faridzadeh of the International Society for Iranian Culture and Parviz Morewedge of Global Scholarly Publications, for being willing to take the chance on me that this project has required them to take; Maryam Samani, my wife, for taking the time to understand for herself the often difficult Persian of the *Gulistan* when I needed to consult the original text and for her patience and her love; and our son, Shahob, for being as patient as a five-year-old can be when work on this book necessarily took me away from him.

In addition, portions of this translation have appeared in the following journals:

Parts of the “Adoration and Preamble” and Story 1 of “Padeshahan” appeared in the online translation journal *cipherjournal.com*.

Story 2 of “Padeshahan” appeared in the journal *Circumference*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For consistency's sake, I have used in my text the transliterations of Persian words as Edward Rehatsek spelled them in his version of the *Gulistan*. When Rehatsek's spellings seemed inaccurate or inconsistent, I referred to Steingass' *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*. The spelling of Persian words in passages that I quote from other texts are those of the writer(s) I am quoting.

Regarding the quotations from the Quran given in the footnotes: Since I assume that most English-speaking readers of this text are, like me, unlikely to have read much of the Quran, I have quoted in the footnotes the entire passage within which the verses quoted by Saadi appear. I do not mean to imply by this any particular interpretation of either the verses from the Quran quoted by Saadi or the passages in the *Gulistan* where Saadi quotes them. I simply wanted to give readers a quick taste of the text that Saadi was quoting from—though he, of course, quoted from it in the original Arabic.

Chapter titles, except for Setayesh va Moghaddamah (Adoration and Preamble) and Khatemeh (Conclusion), are transliterations of either the whole or part of Saadi's titles.

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INTRODUCTION

When my wife and I got married—she is from Iran—we decided to read poems to express publicly how we felt about each other. She chose a poem by Hafez; I, one by Yehuda Amichai that had been translated into English by Robert Friend. The only English version we had of the Hafez poem, however, made the man whom many consider the Persian language's greatest lyric poet sound like a second-class greeting-card versifier. At the time, my Persian was non-existent, and so my wife produced a literal, line-by-line rendering of the poem, and I used that to compose the translation that she read. On the video we have of that day, you can see in her eyes as she reads to me how deeply she feels the words she is saying, and just now, remembering it, I stopped typing so that I could stare out the window of the Starbuck's where I'm sitting and relive those moments again. I can still recite the poem's first few lines:

Call me and I will come.
From between the bars
of earth's closed cage,
a bird of heaven,
I will come.

I open the file containing the poem on my laptop and read it through for the first time in many years. I did not claim then, and I would not claim now, that my translation is anything other than occasional, and I can see now many places where I could make changes that would free the language to become its own poem in English and not merely a version of Hafez that fit the occasion of our marriage. Still, I think some small part of Hafez speaks through my words, and I imagine how beautiful it must be to be able to read him in the original.

Like rain for the earth,
bless me. Before the wind
puts my dust
beyond the reach of your hand,
touch me,
and I will come.

...
To the fragrance of your presence,
dancing I will rise,
clapping I will come to you
with a rhythm of joy.

When I wrote those lines, most of the translations of Hafez that have since been published—by Elizabeth T. Gray, Daniel Landinsky and Thomas Rain Crowe, to name a few—were still five or six years from seeing print, and I had no idea how important a poet Hafez actually was. I did vaguely know the name Rumi, though I had not read any of the translations of his work that were available, and, anyway, I had classified him in my imagination and my ignorance as someone whose work would appeal more to a mysticism-oriented, New-Age sensibility than to that of a serious writer. What I knew about Persian literature, in other words, could probably have filled, if I were lucky, half the back of a postage stamp.

Not that I wasn't interested in learning. Early on in our marriage, I suggested to my wife that we should work together to translate contemporary Iranian poetry. That project never got off the ground, though, and so, except for the very limited reading that I did on my own, my ignorance of Persian literature remained firmly in place. Then, last year, my friend Iraj called and asked if I'd be interested in joining a project to produce summaries in English of some of the major works of classical Persian literature. Of course I was interested. Here was a chance to read a body of work I knew next to nothing about and that was also part of my wife's cultural heritage. When I found out, however, at my first meeting with Mehdi Faridzadeh of the International Society for Iranian Culture, whose brainchild this project was, that the goal was to produce not summaries of these works, but literary translations, I balked. I

speak and understand some Persian, but I neither read nor write the language. How, I wondered to myself, could I hope adequately to translate works that my wife talks about trying to read in the way that I talk about trying to read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*?

I knew, of course, that many well-known writers have translated works into English from languages they didn't know, or knew about as well as I knew Persian—Ezra Pound, W. S. Merwin, William Butler Yeats, Adrienne Rich, and Kenneth Rexroth, to name a few—but I had not gone to my meeting with Mehdi thinking at all about the responsibility to the people and culture of both the source and target languages that literary translation always entails. I worried that what Mehdi had in mind was way over my head, and so I asked him point blank why he had not tried to find someone who was fluent in Persian. He explained that he was more interested in producing English versions of these books that people would actually enjoy reading than in scholarly or technical accuracy. What he wanted was an English-speaking poet who would use the scholarly translations that already existed, and that everyone agreed were generally accurate, to produce works in English that would have literary merit. These new translations, he hoped, would provide a new window into Iranian culture for people in the English-speaking world.

I was still unsure, but, especially when Mehdi told me that Saadi's *Gulistan*, the first of the books he wanted to do, had not been translated in its entirety into English since the 1880s,¹ I was intrigued. I agreed to produce some samples from the *Gulistan*, submitted them to Mehdi, who liked them, and the result is the book you are holding in your hand. As far as I can tell, it is the first new literary translation into English of Saadi's masterpiece in at least a century that includes excerpts from the entire text. Not that the work has been totally ignored. At least two other twentieth century scholar-writers, Dick Davis and A. J. Arberry, have produced translations of smaller portions of the text;² the ubiquitous Coleman Barks has translated some of Saadi's poems, as did Basil Bunting, and there is even a book called *Saadi Stories For Young Adults*, excerpts from Saadi translated for teens by Muhammad Nur Abdus Salam.

My translation, however, is based primarily on Edward Rehatsek's 1888 version, which is generally recognized as the most accurate complete translation that we have.³ I also consulted two other translations: *The Rose Garden (Gulistan)*, translated by Omar Ali-Shah and *Kings and Beggars: The First Two Chapters of Sa'di's Gulistan*, translated by A. J. Arberry. When I needed to consult the original Persian, my wife, Maryam Samani, served as my principal source.

In the preface to *Kings and Beggars*, Arberry asks a question that bears directly on Mehdi's reasons for undertaking this project and that I think is even more relevant today than it was when Arberry asked it:

Another translation of the *Gulistan*? What is wrong with Gladwin's, Eastwick's, Platt's, Burton's, Arnold's? But first there is a still more fundamental question to be considered: why translate the *Gulistan* at all?

But some readers may not have heard of the *Gulistan* or its author: far fewer people know anything about Persian literature nowadays, than at any time during the past century and a half. And that is a pity, because Persian literature is still largely unexplored territory, in spite of the extensive prospecting of a notable succession of English scholars; and much remains to be done in interpreting and appreciating even the familiar and popular books, like for instance the *Gulistan*.⁴

Most people in the United States, and perhaps in many other parts of the world as well, still don't know a lot about Persian literature, but they do, at least in the U.S., think they know an awful lot about the culture and people of Iran. A great deal, if not all of what they think they know, however, has been shaped less by any direct encounter with Iranians or Iranian culture than by the various interests competing to shape and politicize our understanding of Iran's place in the world. I have my own ideas about the people and institutions who embody those interests, as you most probably do as well. We do ourselves a disservice, though, not to mention the disservice we do the Iranian people, when we allow those inter-

ests to be almost the sole lens through which we can view Iranians and their country.

It is, for example, hard to imagine, or at least it was hard for me to imagine before I began working on this project, that Persian literature was understood at the end of the 19th century to be something that the average educated reader in English should know about. Reading John D. Yohannan's book, *Persian Poetry in England and America: A 200-Year History*, I was surprised to learn how many of the writers I'd studied in college had been influenced by Persian literature, and by Saadi specifically, among them Longfellow, Tennyson and Byron—who called Saadi a Persian Catullus—and Melville, Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who referred to the *Gulistan* as a secular bible and wrote not only a poem called "Saadi," but also the preface to the 1865 edition of Francis Gladwin's 1806 translation, the first translation of the complete text to appear in English.

So what happened over the course of the next eighty years—Arberry's translation was published in 1945—that people's interest in Persian literature had declined to the point where he could cite it as justification for translating the *Gulistan* once again? I'm sure the answer to this question is complex and many-faceted, but having read some portion of most of the existing *Gulistan* translations, I would hazard a guess that they are themselves part of the reason for people's loss of interest. It's not that I think they are "bad" in any simplistic sense. Each, as far as I am able to determine, served the purpose set for it by its author, from rendering the *Gulistan* into more or less accurate English to approximating in English the stylistic and poetic affects achieved in Persian by Saadi. It is, however, hard for me to imagine anyone reading these translations now, or even at the time they were published, and being moved in anything other than a purely intellectual fashion, a response which Saadi himself says he tried to avoid by filling the *Gulistan* with humor and linguistic playfulness.

To be fair, Arberry makes only very modest claims for his work—"For my own part, I confess to a full conviction of having done Sa'di scant justice in the pages that follow"⁵—and I am in no way faulting him or other earlier translators for failing to capture

Saadi's humor and technical skill, especially since I doubt that I have been any more successful than they were. Persian allows for a kind of wordplay in poetry that is very difficult to render into English, though from what I am able to understand it resembles the punning and homophonic effects that Shakespeare achieved in his work or that the Metaphysical poets achieved in theirs. Even more to the point, humor is notoriously difficult to translate from one contemporary language to another, much less from thirteenth century Persia to today. Nonetheless, the *Gulistan* is filled with poems that are supposed to move readers as poetry, and with stories and characters that, while they may not be developed in ways that meet our contemporary expectations for fiction, are nonetheless supposed to engage readers as stories and characters, and not as mere props for communicating ideas.

I think of the translations that have moved me to return to them again and again, not because I have to read them, or because they hold some cultural or historical interest that I need or want to pursue, but because something in the text opened to me, broadened my sense of the world and myself in ways that only a foreign sensibility can do. These translations have this effect on me, I think, because whatever position the translators took vis-à-vis fidelity to the original, what they cared about was creating an engaging, entertaining and moving portrait in English of the literature they were translating.

My own goal has been to create such a portrait of the *Gulistan*, taking my cue from what I understand Saadi's reputation to be in Persian. Here, for example, translated by Arberry, is the Persian scholar, 'Abd al-'Azim Garakāni, describing Saadi's gifts as a writer:

As a master of language and eloquence, Sa'dī is one of the greatest writers and stylists of the Persian tongue. With his purity of speech, unrivalled ease of craftsmanship, and fluency, he raised the level of language from the soil to the stars and elevated speech to a sublimity attained by but few writers and poets. For elegance and sweetness of language, choiceness and rhetoric of style, and power and range of expression, he is without rival. Combining elegance with refinement, he bedecks the

bride of thought in the loveliest clothing and adornment, and sends her forth upon the stage of popular ideas, for all to understand and appreciate without toil or labor.... It is a sufficient testimony to his mastery and superior gifts, that although nearly seven centuries have now elapsed since his age, his words are like the best words of the present time, and are agreeable to the temperaments of the whole community and in conformity with universal taste...⁶

Critics in English have talked about Shakespeare in very similar terms, and the comparison is apt not only in the historical sense that Saadi and Shakespeare are each considered in their own languages to represent the highest peaks of literary achievement. We forget that Shakespeare was writing for a popular audience. His plays were the top notch situation comedies and TV dramas of his day, and so his language, while it may be challenging for us, must have been more or less easily accessible to his audience at the time. Garakāni makes the same claim for Saadi, though the other translators I have read do not seem to have taken this claim very much to heart. Here, for example, is Edward Rehatsek's version of the opening of the *Gulistan*:

Laudation to the God of majesty and glory! Obedience to him is a cause of approach and gratitude in increase of benefits. Every inhalation of breath prolongs life and every exhalation of it gladdens our nature; wherefore every breath confers two benefits and for every benefit gratitude is due.⁷

The Saadi who speaks in these lines, for me anyway, is obscure and mystifying, and purposely so, and I find it hard to believe that readers in the 1880's would have felt much differently. He sounds like a caricature of the overly pedantic scholar or philosopher whom everybody recognizes as brilliant but who can't connect his ideas to the way real people actually think and feel. Perhaps more to the point, though, Rehatsek's Saadi also sounds like someone who is learning English as a second language and is having a hard time translating one idiom into another.

After maturely considering these sentiments, I thought proper to sit down in the mansion of retirement, to fold up the skirts of association, to wash my tablets of heedless sayings and no more to indulge in senseless prattle.⁸

The “foreignizing” of English—“the mansion of retirement,” “the skirts of association”—is an important function of literary translation, and I do not want to slight or trivialize it.⁹ To imagine retirement as a house in which one lives (and Saadi meant not retirement from work, but withdrawal from daily life into a life of religious contemplation), or of one’s association with people as a kind of garment (the “skirts” Saadi refers to are the bottoms of the robes people wore during his time), is to make possible in English ways of expressing feelings and ideas about what it means to be a member of a community and/or an individual with religious feelings that might not have existed before. What Rehatsek was trying to do, in other words, had the potential to enrich the English language. That he was unsuccessful, I think, is clear from the fact that the resulting expressions are not only awkward and unusable in English, but also reveal little of the original meaning.

Kings and Beggars, Arberry’s translation of the *Gulistan*, is also crafted to suggest Saadi’s foreignness, both in terms of culture and the fact that the *Gulistan* dates from the 1200s. In his renderings of Saadi’s verse, for example, Arberry uses syntactical inversions and levels of diction that sound more like imitations of Shakespeare than what I imagine Saadi would sound like if he spoke contemporary English. Sometimes this strategy works, and sometimes it doesn’t. Here, for example, are two stanzas that I think work from the first chapter, which Arberry calls, “On the Character of Kings.”¹⁰

This I can do, to keep my arm
From bringing any soul to harm;
Yet how to envious minds give ease
That are themselves their own disease?

Then die, O thou that enviest,
 If thou wouldst win at last to rest:
 The pain that envy quickeneth
 None may escape, except in death.¹¹

Other times, however, Arberry's Saadi sounds almost like Mother Goose. This is from "On the Manners Of Dervishes."

When rust the iron has devoured
 By rubbing it shall not be scoured;
 As soon drive nails into a stone
 As move black hearts by words alone.¹²

Another way in which Arberry brings into his translation that which is foreign in the *Gulistan* is by recreating in English the rhymed prose that Saadi uses throughout the work. The problem is that Saadi often comes off sounding like Ogden Nash, but without the humor. This is also from "On the Manners Of Dervishes." (I have followed Arberry's typographical convention of indicating where the rhymes fall by adding additional space between words, even within the same sentence.)

In the morning I loosed a dinar from my purse, a turban from my head and both before the singer for grace deposited; holding him close to me I gave him thanks repeatedly. My friends, regarding my devotion to him as contrary to all accepted notion, imputed it to feebleness of mind in me. One among them shot out the tongue of disapprobation and thus began his castigation: "Your behavior here has not been in relation to the judgment of wise men, to give the dervish robe to such a minstrel as this—never in all his life did any silver into his palm come nor yet a scrap of gold upon his drum.

You can see how the need to maintain the rhyme scheme forced Arberry into syntactical inversions and word choices—disapprobation, castigation—that both elevate and "foreignize" the diction. He also clearly decided to continue Rehatsek's strategy of translating literally figurative expressions that have no equivalent in

English—“shot out the tongue of disapprobation.” Yet, while there is real value in trying to recreate Saadi’s rhymed prose, if only to see how far the musical possibilities of prose in English can be stretched, the exercise itself, almost by definition, results in writing that is anything but elegant and refined, at least as we understand those terms today, or fluent—I am referring here to Garakāni’s description of Saadi that I quoted earlier—or in conformity with anything resembling universal taste.

I will not claim for my translation either elegance or refinement, or any of the other adjectives that Garakāni applies to Saadi, but I have made formal choices that I hope move my version of the *Gulistan* in that direction. I have tried to introduce into the prose the kind of linguistic interest and narrative tension that seems to me so lacking in Rehatsek’s translation, and in Arberry’s as well, though I did not do this in any systematic way, which I think the very different kinds of “stories” that Saadi wrote in the *Gulistan* make impossible to begin with. Rather, I allowed my own response to each story to dictate the approach that seemed to me appropriate for rendering it into English.

My strategy regarding Saadi’s verse was more systematic. I love to listen to people from Iran as they recite poetry in Persian. Even though I usually understand only a very small portion of what they say, I listen with great pleasure to the way they give each line the full measure of its cadence and shape each vowel, according to the meter, into its full resonance. Blank verse is the only form in English that seems to me to approach the stateliness of the music I hear in Persian poetry, and so blank verse is what I chose to write in, even though, as a poetic strategy, it departs radically from the strategies employed by Saadi, who not only uses different poetic forms throughout the text, but also employs the kind of rhyming and wordplay that prove so problematic in Arberry’s translation.

The more I worked in blank verse, however, the more I became convinced it was the right choice for two additional reasons. First, as Arberry points out in his introduction, Saadi’s poetry in the *Gulistan* is a moralizing poetry, and some of the greatest such poetry in English—Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, for example—is in blank verse. Second, as I have pointed out, at least one critic in Persian

talks about Saadi in terms very similar to the ones critics have used in English to talk about Shakespeare, and the more I read of Saadi, the more I felt that these two writers were connected by more than what critics have had to say about them. It's true that they wrote in very different genres and in very different historical periods and cultural circumstances, but they ask very similar questions about the worlds in which they lived. Each, for example, is very concerned about the nature of rulership and royal power, and each as well explores the role religion and the clergy ought to play in every day life.

A case in point is Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure*, which is in large part an exploration of what it means for someone in power to pass that power on to someone else. Vincentio, the duke of Vienna, cedes his power and authority completely to Angelo, and the action of the play unfolds around the tension created when Angelo insists on enforcing the letter rather than the spirit of the law. One could argue that much of the *Gulistan* as a whole is concerned with making the choice between the spirit and the letter of the law, but, more specifically, there are at least six stories that deal with the question of the passing on of power in terms very similar to those that *Measure for Measure* was written to explore. (See stories 8, 9, 18, 20, 27 and 39 in "Padeshahan" and story 28 in "Darvishan.") This is not the place, however, to enter into a detailed comparison and contrast of these two great writers. My point here is simply that the more I saw shades of Shakespeare in Saadi, and shades of Saadi in Shakespeare, the more blank verse, Shakespeare's meter, seemed the appropriate way to render the poetry of the *Gulistan* into English.

I can imagine that some readers might wonder how much of Saadi I have lost through this juxtaposition with Shakespeare. The question is a fair, though ultimately unanswerable one. Saadi has always existed in the West more as an idea than a biographical figure, and the idea the West has had of him has always been at least as much about the West's own cultural agenda than the desire to know Persians and Persian literature on their own terms.¹³ When Andre du Ryer published *L'Emprise des Roses* in 1634, for example, calling Saadi "prince des Poetes Turcs et Persans," this first transla-

tion of the *Gulistan* into a European language helped to engender a sea change in the way Europe viewed Islam and its people. The absolute hatred of the Crusades—which took place during Saadi’s lifetime—gave way to the Enlightenment view of Muslims and their culture as essentially no different from Christians and Jews, each representing a branch of the monotheistic, Abrahamic tradition.¹⁴ Following Pitt’s India Act of 1784, however, which brought the operations of the East Indian Company and its extensive involvement in the governance of India under the British Crown, Saadi came to be seen instead as providing a key to understanding the essential otherness of the Indians who were Britain’s colonial subjects. As Yohannan says in *The Poet Sa’di: A Persian Humanist*, Pitt’s India Act made Indian civilization “a practical and direct concern of the general English public,” and since

Persian was the language of the Mogul courts, it was almost a patriotic duty for the Englishman to cultivate it. An anglicized cousin of Jean Jacques Rousseau believed that a knowledge of Persian would make for more efficient dealings with the perfidious natives, whether merchants or soldiers. There was in fact presently launched, by Sir William Jones, his associates and his successors, a veritable crash program of Persian studies, both in India and at home.

In the education of Englishmen in the ways of their Moslem colonials, Sa’di played a very important role. His didactic works had exerted an enormous influence upon the popular Islamic mind, and they were a key for unlocking the psychology of both the rulers and the ruled in Moslem India. One of the first publications to come out of the new Indian educational program was *A Compendium of Ethics*, the text and translation of the *Pandnameh* erroneously attributed to Sa’di. This was followed by such compilations as *The Persian Interpreter* and *The Persian Moonshee* (scribe), which contained the inevitable quotations from Sa’di and other Persian authors. Some of these books were especially designed for training civil servants. One, a bowdlerized *Gulistan*, was intended for use by Christian children. All were aimed at making British rule in India more efficient.¹⁵

Not only, in other words, did British colonialism end up identifying Saadi more with India than his native Persia, but it also completely reversed the Enlightenment's view of Saadi as a writer whose work expressed the kind of universal humanism that Enlightenment thinkers themselves espoused.

For Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose poem "Saadi" was published in 1899, Saadi was "the poet [who] dwells alone." Charged by God to "sit aloof," apart from the "race of men" that he loved and for whom he wrote, Saadi also, in Emerson's imagination, transcended the limited and limiting orthodoxy of the "sad-eyed Fakirs," whose "high gods love[d] tragedy" and who were more concerned with avoiding divine wrath than in celebrating divine presence. Through this transcendence of traditional religion, Emerson's Saadi is also able to make irrelevant religious partisanship of all kinds:

Let theist, atheist, pantheist,
 Define and wrangle how they list,—
 Fierce conserver, fierce destroyer,
 But thou joy-giver and enjoyer,
 Unknowing war, unknowing crime,
 Gentle Saadi, mind thy rhyme.
 Heed not what the brawlers say,
 Heed thou only Saadi's lay.

Emerson's vision of Saadi is indeed in the *Gulistan* and can be found perhaps most obviously in the following verse from the book's final chapter:

I watched a Muslim and a Jew debate
 and shook with laughter at their childishness.
 The Muslim swore, "If what I've done is wrong,
 may God cause me to die a Jew." The Jew
 swore as well, "If what I've said is false,
 I swear by the holy Torah that I will die
 a Muslim, like you." If tomorrow the earth
 fell suddenly void of all wisdom,
 no one would admit that it was gone.

And the *Gulistan* is as well filled with the kinds of universal humanist insights that so sparked Emerson's imagination:

All men and women are to each other
 the limbs of a single body, each of us
 created from the life God gave to Adam.
 When time's passage withers you to nothing,
 I will grieve as if I'd lost a leg;
 but you, who will not feel another's pain,
 you've lost the right to call yourself human.¹⁶

The Saadi of the *Gulistan*, however, did not, as Emerson says, "dwell alone"—a point he makes clear throughout the text—and he is not above getting his authorial hands dirty in deeply Machiavellian ways, directly contradicting the sweeping humanism of passages like the one I just quoted. Story 8 in "Padeshahan," for example, advises kings to imprison men who fear them because those men are likely to become future enemies of the throne.

It is, in other words, difficult to say that the *Gulistan* embodies or argues categorically for any one particular approach to life. Indeed, as E. G. Browne puts it in his *Literary History of Persia*,

[I]n [Saadi's] works is matters for every taste, the highest and the lowest, the most refined and the most coarse, and from his pages sentiments may be culled worthy on the one hand of Eckhardt or Thomas a Kempis, or on the other hand of Caesar Borgia¹⁷ and Heliogabalus.¹⁸ His writings are a microcosm of the East, alike in its best and its most ignoble aspects, and it is not without good reason that, wherever the Persian language is studied, they are, and have been for six centuries, the first books placed in the learner's hands.¹⁹

The history of the translation of the *Gulistan* into English is in some measure the history of how Saadi's translators have chosen to handle the "highest and lowest" elements of the text, especially those with explicit sexual content. Rehatsek's translation was the first to present this content unaltered in its substance. Before him, translators tended to heterosexualize homoerotic content or to

render into Latin passages they considered inappropriate for all but the most sophisticated readers. The selection from the *Gulistan* that I was asked to translate includes very few of these passages, so I'm going to leave a more detailed discussion of this aspect of the *Gulistan* for another time, noting only that the sexual and gender politics of the book are worthy of further study. More than once, for example, Saadi makes reference to notions of manliness and manhood that are different from the ones we hold today. Here is the entire sixth axiom from Chapter 8, "Adab'eh Soh'bat."

Wealth requires trade; learning requires debate; a kingdom requires laws. Without the latter, the former will not survive.

Sometimes you can win a person's heart
with kind words and manly generosity.
Sometimes, though, you'll need to instill fear.
Then use your anger. Like a single dose
of colocynth,²⁰ it will be more effective
than a hundred jars of the world's finest sugar.

And here is the challenge Saadi issues in Story 20 from Chapter 7, "Ta'alim Va Tarbiyat," to the man against whose critique Saadi is defending the wealthy:

You whose thunderous speech is empty bluster,
if you have nothing when your struggle comes,
how will you struggle? You say you are a man.
Then give up the thousand prayer-beads-on-a-string
you've used till now to prove your righteousness.
Show what you're made of: purge yourself of greed.

In each case, it is an inner strength—generosity, the ability to purge oneself of greed—that signifies manliness and manhood, an ethic that stands in stark contrast to the equation we tend to make in United States culture between a fully realized masculinity and sheer physical prowess.

Saadi's ideas about women are stereotypically misogynist. "To ask a woman's advice," he writes in Chapter 8, "is to invite your

own destruction,” and then later, “Reason will surrender itself to lust the way a weak man surrenders himself in the hands of a cunning woman.” To this last axiom, he adds the following couplet: “Allow a woman’s voice to dominate/your home, and you empty its rooms of all pleasure.” Indeed, very few women appear in the *Gulistan*, and among those that do, only a very few of them actually speak. When they do speak, however, even if we don’t agree with the values they espouse, it’s hard not to respect them for their ability to say plainly what’s on their minds. In Story 2 from “Za’af va Piri,” for example, a woman who has just finished listening to her much older husband’s attempt to convince her that she is better off with him than with a younger man says, “Nothing you have told me tonight outweighs in my heart the truth of the proverb I learned from the women of my tribe: *An arrow in a young woman’s side is better than an old man in her bed.*”

I will leave to others the question of who the Saadi of my text is and whether the idea of him I have constructed does or does not do justice to the literary tradition in which he wrote, the tradition of translation of which my work is a part and/or what we know, or think we know, about him as a historical person. However, since the Saadi who speaks from these pages is the product of a complex and subtle collaboration between myself and Edward Rehatsek’s reading of Saadi’s original text, I need to acknowledge an important difference between other recent translations and my own. As Arberry indicates at the end of his preface:

But if this latest attempt to put a quarter of the *Gulistan* into English has no other merit, it is at least built upon the solid foundation of a sounder text [produced by the late Muhammad Ali Furughi] than any previous translator has had the chance of handling.²¹

The difference this “sounder text” makes in the translations that result from it are at times quite striking. Rehatsek’s translation, for example, contains a different number of stories per chapter than does Arberry’s, and there are entire passages—most notably the poetry that appears in my translation on pages 8 and 9—that by Arberry’s time had been shown to be a later addition to the *Gulistan*

manuscript and not part of Saadi's original text—though my friend Iraj did find it in his copy of Saadi's other great work, the *Bustan*, which was written before the *Gulistan*.

Since I do not read Persian and so could not myself check Rehatsek's version against the more current and accurately edited original, I decided for consistency's sake to leave such passages in my translation so that I did not end up excluding some erroneous passages, while, out of ignorance, leaving others intact. I have noted the questionable passages I was able to identify and leave to another time, and perhaps even another translator, the project of making this translation—assuming people find it worthwhile—consistent with what is understood today to be the original *Gulistan* manuscript.

For me, one of the ironies of translating the *Gulistan* has been learning just how little we know about the man who wrote it, despite the fact that he is one of Persian literature's greatest writers. He was born in the city of Shiraz as early as 1194 CE or as late as 1218 and he is believed to have died in either 1291 or 1292. We know that he lived through the Mongol conquest, but we are not sure what his given name was—Saadi is a pen name that he took most probably to honor the man for whom he wrote the *Gulistan*—and we know for a fact that at least some of the first person narratives in the book are not factually autobiographical, placing him, for example, in the company of people who died before he was born or suggesting that he traveled to places it is highly improbable he traveled to.

The "I" in the *Gulistan*, in other words, is constructed; it is a persona; and there is evidence that Saadi constructed this persona very deliberately. Towards the end of the adoration of God with which the book opens, a holy man awakens from his meditative trance and explains that he "reached the rose bush" (of enlightenment) and was preparing to bring the roses back to his friends when the powerful beauty of their scent "intoxicated" him so deeply that he could not hold the blossoms in his hand. Saadi's point is that true enlightenment is not something that can be passed on from one person to another. It is, rather, something that must be experienced personally, and anyone who thinks otherwise

is a pretender who will never achieve what he seeks. The second time a rose garden is mentioned is in the section where Saadi explains why he wrote the *Gulistan*. He and a friend spend the night in a beautiful garden. The next morning, the friend starts to gather flowers and herbs to bring back to town but Saadi stops him, pointing out that the plants he is picking will wither and die. Instead, Saadi proposes to write the *Gulistan*—the word itself means rose garden—because this way the blossoms he passes onto his friends will live forever.

By thus setting himself up as an alternative to the holy man, Saadi implicitly proposes his book as an alternative path to enlightenment, one that exists not in the rarefied air of the religious ascetic's quest for spiritual purity, but in the day to day life of the world. Since the *Gulistan* is fundamentally a book of instruction and advice for how to live in that world, it makes sense that Saadi would want to present himself as someone with a wide variety of experiences, both good and bad; someone who had dealt with many different kinds of people and heard many different kinds of stories; someone, in other words, who knew what he was talking about and who therefore needed to be taken seriously. Saadi's persona in the *Gulistan*—well-traveled, companion to kings and beggars alike, confidante of lovers and more—accomplishes that task quite admirably.

Shortly after I finished the first draft of this manuscript, I had lunch with a friend who works in the insurance industry. He congratulated me with great enthusiasm because he knew how hard I had been working, but then he looked at me and without the smallest hint of sarcasm or cynicism in his voice asked me to give him the “two sentence version” of why my translation was at all significant beyond my own accomplishment. After all, Saadi wrote the *Gulistan* almost 800 years ago. What possible relevance could it have today for people like him? I'd like to answer that question here by quoting a press release from Movement One: Creative Coalition, an organization with which I have recently become involved. Movement One gathers poets from around the world who live in Queens, NY and provides a forum for them to read and discuss their work. Each year in September, the group sponsors the

Queens International Poetry Festival, at which those poets perform, many of them in languages other than English and some of them accompanied by English translations of their poems. This is from the press release for the upcoming 2004 festival:

Though the event is not a memorial of the tragic events begun on September 11, 2001, it is an assertion of the communication and inter-cultural work necessary to assure that mass destruction will cease.

It is my hope that this translation of the *Gulistan* proves a useful contribution to that work.

Richard Jeffrey Newman
Jackson Heights, NY
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SETAYESH VA
MOGHADDAMAH

ADORATION AND PREAMBLE

*In the name of God, the Merciful
and Compassionate.*

All praise to God! Obey Him and you draw near Him. Thank Him and His bounty is yours. In each breath you take there are two blessings: The air that fills your lungs prolongs your life. Giving that air back to the world refreshes your soul. For each of these blessings, each time you receive it, you must thank Him.

But in whose words is there sufficient music,
in the work of whose hands sufficient grace,
to satisfy the terms of this sweet debt?
*"O House of David, act and give thanks."
But few among my creatures are thankful.²²*
Better to lie prostrate before God's throne,
begging his forgiveness for our sins.

He bathes even the smallest speck of dust in His infinite mercy, invites the world to the feast that is His generosity, and so even those whose sins are great do not lose face before Him. Even if they deserve it, He does not let them starve.

Compassionate One, You hold heaven open,
nourishing the Christian and the Zoroastrian
despite the fact that they would see You fall.
What further proof do Your defenders need
that their portion will be even greater?

At His command, the morning breeze plays chamberlain to creation, covering the earth with the emerald carpet of spring. The clouds play wet-nurse, suckling His newly born daughters, seedlings nestled in the cradle of the soil. Trees draw the green robe of the new year across their breasts and each branch, a child sporting a new hat, wears a blossom to welcome the season of the roses. He takes the young grapes from the vine and makes their juices sweet, and it is His care that transforms the planted date-seed into the tree that towers over us.

Clouds and wind, moon and sun, all obey Him
for you. For you they work, crossing the sky,
coaxing the food you harvest from the land.
Justice demands that you obey Him as well.

Mohammad, the chosen one, prince of creation, most perfect of all that God has caused to exist; Mohammad, the merciful, whose life completes time in its turning,²³ blessing and peace be upon you:

Fearing your beauty, darkness fled before you,
prophet marked with the seal of God: Kind,
majestic, generous, approachable;
intercessor whose word must be obeyed—
blessings be on you and your family.
Who would dare breach the wall our faith has built,
knowing we have you to give us strength?
Why should we fear the storm of any sea,
when Noah pilots the boat we sail?

It is said that when a sinner stands repentant before the court of heaven, beseeching God with arms raised and hands outstretched, God chooses not to notice him. If the sinner increases his efforts, however, beating his breast and begging for mercy as the tears pour from his eyes, God turns to His angels, “What other lord does this man have? His prayers have shamed Me. He is forgiven.”

Witness God's benevolence and tact:
In judgment, He does not shame the sinner.
He takes the sinner's shame upon Himself.

The akefan,²⁴ who fill their lives worshipping Him, confess their inadequacy, "Our prayers are only shadows of those Your glory demands of us."

Those who try to capture his splendor with words are themselves caught, entranced by his beauty, "We do not know You as You deserve to be known."

And if someone asks me, what will I do
except despair? How give form to no-form?
The lovers lie mute, slain by the beloved,
silence the only shape their love can take.

A man of God immersed himself in meditation. When he emerged from the vision that was granted him, a smiling companion welcomed him back, "What beautiful gift have you brought us from the garden in which you were walking?"

The holy man replied, "I walked until I reached the rosebush, where I gathered up the skirts of my robe to hold the roses I wanted to present to my friends, but the scent of the petals so intoxicated me that I let everything fall from my hands."

O morning bird, learn love from the moth,
which gives itself in silence to the fire.
Pretenders seek enlightenment in vain,
waiting to follow those who won't return.
And You who transcend all we can imagine,
whose existence we can neither guess at
nor claim to know as fact, of whose glory
all the world's words—spoken or written—fall
immeasurably short, the end is here,
and we stand as we did when it all began,
tongue-tied lovers, awe-struck at Your beauty.

The high regard Saadi has won among the people; the world-wide renown his eloquence enjoys; the fact that men and women crave the music of his verse, the tales and proverbs he has penned, as strongly as they crave sugar on their tongues; that possession of even a scrap of paper filled with his words is proclaimed in the street and that the paper is passed from hand to hand like the rarest of treasures—none of this results from Saadi’s virtue or perfection. But the lord of the world, the axis around which time revolves, a sovereign second only to Solomon, protector of the faithful, His Majesty the Shahanshah Abek Aa’zm Muzaffaruddin Abu Bekr Ben Saad Ben Zanki—he is Allah’s shadow on earth!²⁵ O Lord be pleased with him and with his kingdom—has looked with favor on Saadi, has sung Saadi’s praises and shown Saadi sincere affection. So all men now love Saadi, because people follow the example of their king.

If the Sultan finds a slave’s faults pleasing,
 those faults become virtues. My faults are many,
 but because you’ve deigned to notice who I am,
 I am more celebrated than the sun.
 I held as I bathed a perfumed piece of clay
 that came to me from a beloved’s hand.
 I asked it, “Are you musk or ambergris?
 Like fine wine, your smell intoxicates me.”
 “Till someone set me down beside a rose,”
 it said, “I was a loathsome lump of clay.
 My companion’s scent seeped into me.
 Otherwise, I am only the earth that I am.”

Allah, prolong his life, and because each favor You bestow upon him is bestowed as well upon the Muslims, reward his princely character and noble deeds even more greatly than You do now. Exalt his friends and those who govern with him; annihilate his enemies—all this for the sake of what is written in the Quran. O Allah, bring security to his kingdom and keep his son safe.

Truly the world rejoices when he does.
May his happiness endure forever!
And may the Lord keep him strong, the banners
of victory flying always before him
like flower petals blooming. He is the root
that keeps their beauty fed, and the world knows
such beauty depends on its seed's virtue.

May our exalted and hallowed creator guarantee for the pure
city of Shiraz, until the day of final judgment, the peace and secu-
rity brought to its people by the righteousness of its rulers and the
conscientiousness of its scholars.

Do you wonder why I roamed for so long
so far from home? I left to free myself
from the tangled twist of negro²⁶ hair
the Turks had made the world I knew. People
prowled like sharp-clawed wolves, fangs bared,
lusting for blood.

I've returned to find peace.
Even the tigers have given up the hunt.
Still, this hard-earned calm can be deceptive.
Threaten a man in whose inner life
an angel dwells and you will watch him become
a lion prepared to fight to the death.
I fled confusion, anxiety and pain.
I find them banished at your command, Sultan
Atabek Abu Bekr Ben Saad Zanki,
and as long as you rule, shadow of God,
Pars need not fear the ravages of time.
Nowhere else on earth do people have
the comfort you bring to those you govern.
The burden of their protection is yours;
of gratitude, ours; of your reward, God's,
for as long as the world and the wind endure.

I sat one night reflecting on the years of my wasted life, re-counting for myself each opportunity I had missed. Tears of regret fell from my eyes like sparkling diamonds, piercing the stone wall I had built around my heart, bringing light where there had been darkness. I recited these lines:

I know life leaves me with each breath I take,
and these last fifty years I've been asleep.
Not much time remains. How, in what's left,
can I make up for all I haven't done?
The man who chooses not to start his work
will die when God beats the drum of his death,
and he will die in shame, his heart empty.
In the morning, when he needs to go,
the traveler prefers to walk his dreams.
Outside his window, a foundation
waits for the one who will finish his task,
but that man, when he comes, also fails to build,
losing himself in his predecessor's dream.
Do not squander the sweetness of your embrace
on a friend who turns away when you need him.
"Everything dies" is the only certainty.
Virtuous men are happy when their time comes.
Prepare your grave: send provisions ahead.
For who will bear them for you when you're gone?
The sun is Tammuz²⁷, melting life away.
The man sees little snow remains, yet does nothing.
You went to the bazaar empty handed.
I fear you will return empty as well.
Eat the corn you've planted when it's green
and you'll feast on it again at harvest time.²⁸
A man's belly governs his existence.
Closed tight against the world, it chokes his days.
Held perpetually open, it frees the years
to flow like river water to the sea.
Either way, his death is premature.
Seek therefore to balance holding and releasing.
Be wise, don't overvalue this world's life.
Listen with your soul's ear to Saadi's advice:
This is the way it is. Be a man. Move on.

When I finished reciting, all the words I'd written till then stood before me empty of meaning, and I vowed to wipe them from my life, devoting myself instead to a contemplative solitude free of such pointless chatter.

Better to sit silent in a corner,²⁹
like a deaf man whose tongue has been cut,
than to be one of those who speaks without thinking.

An old friend came to see me. When I heard his voice, I recalled the hours we'd spent sharing our hopes and dreams over coffee in the coffee house, and the difficult times we had as well, when we had only each other to rely on. Still, I did not respond when he spoke to me, nor did look up at him, choosing instead to keep my eyes focused on the ground where I'd been praying. The fact that I appeared to be ignoring him, made him angry and he said:

Speak today while the power is still in you.
If death comes for you tomorrow, my friend,
the silence you now choose will not be a choice.

Someone explained to him that I'd committed myself to a life of silent devotion, urging him to do the same so that he could keep me company. My friend replied, "I swear by the great dignity of Allah and by Saadi's long friendship with me that I will not move from this spot, that I will not even breathe, until Saadi speaks to me the way he used to. It is foolish to insult a friend in this way, and it will be easy for him to atone for breaking the vow of silence he has made. If, as our learned men agree, it is neither proper nor wise for Ali's sword, Zulfiqar, to remain in its scabbard, it is similarly improper and unwise for Saadi's tongue to be sheathed in his mouth.

A man's tongue is the key to who he is.
If he leaves its door locked, how will we know
if he sells jewels or hawks rags on the street?
Silence may be civil, but only if

the occasion does not require you to speak.
Two habits reveal a frivolous mind:
to fill with silence moments that require words;
to offer words when silence is the right response.”

In the end, I could resist neither my friend’s argument nor his sincerity, and I responded:

Consider your opponent well when you fight:
Will you run from him or will he run from you?

I went for a walk to let the spring air clear my head. Winter’s cold had all but disappeared and the roses were just beginning to turn the landscape red.

Green covered the trees like holiday robes
worn by people glad to be alive.
On the first of Ardibihesht Jellali,³⁰
perched on the branches as on a minbar,³¹
the bulbuls³² sang, calling the world to prayer.
Pearls of dew sparkled on rose petals
like tear drops on an angry lover’s cheek.

I spent that night with a different friend beneath the tangled branches of the heart-ravishingly beautiful trees growing in a garden we found, where dew covered the ground like small glass beads and grapes hung like the Pleiades from the vines.

A garden of bright tulips nourished in the sun
by the river running pure and clear beside them.
A grove of trees bent with succulent fruit,
sung to ripeness by the birds nesting there.
In the shade, for our comfort, a bed of
flower petals spread out by the breeze.

The next morning, when our desire to leave had finally grown stronger than our desire to stay, I saw that my friend had gathered roses, sweet basil, hyacinth and other fragrant herbs to take with him back to town. “You know the season holds no loyalty to its

fruit," I said. "The roses will wither and die. As the wise men warn us: 'Do not cherish that which does not last.'"

"What should we do then?" my friend responded.

"I will write a book to instruct and amuse the people, a *gulistan*, a rose garden, whose petals will not fall away at the touch of autumn's wind, and in which it will always be spring, immune to the passing of time."

Why do you need a bowl of roses? Take
from my *Gulistan* instead. A cut flower
lasts just five or six days, but the blossoms
of my garden remain fresh forever.

As soon as I finished speaking, my friend dropped the flowers he had gathered, grabbed the skirts of my robe and said, "When a generous man makes a promise, he keeps it!"

The idea for a chapter on how to behave as a polite and well-spoken person came to me immediately, and I wrote it that day. When I reached the end of the last chapter, I found I'd written quickly enough that some roses still remained in the earthly garden that had inspired the one you hold in your hand. This *Gulistan*, however, will be truly complete only after it has been found worthy in the court of the Shah, whose kindness is the world's refuge, in whom the grace of God's spirit shines like the sun, who is Islam's inviolate protector, strengthened by heaven, fortified against enemies, the right arm whose might brought our nation victory, who shimmers with the light of our resplendent faith, most beautiful of men, the pride of Islam, Sa'd son of Atabek the great, the majestic Shahanshah, owner of the necks of nations, lord of the kings of Arabia and Persia, sultan of the land and the sea, heir to the kingdom of Solomon, Muzaffarudin Abu Bekr son of Sa'd Zanki, may Allah the most high bless them both with continued prosperity, imbuing them with the desire for good deeds.

If the king reads with eyes disposed to kindness,
embellishing my work with his high praise,
he will walk this Rose Garden with great pleasure,
finding here the beauty of Chinese paintings

or the elegant design of the Arzank,³³
and when he reads, “Dedicated to Sa’d
Abu Bekr the son of Zanki,”
his pleasure will do nothing but increase.

Disrespectful as it may seem, my long absence from the royal court has not been without reason. Consider the case of Barzachumihr, who took such care with what he had to say that the wise men of India criticized him for making those to whom he spoke wait far too long to hear his words. When Barzachumihr heard what they had said about him, he replied, "I prefer to think before I speak than to regret what I have said after I have spoken."

A seasoned speaker knows his craft demands
careful thought so as not to waste his words.
Follow his example. Say nothing
if you cannot say it well, and use silence
to show your wisdom before others say
you've said enough. And if they then complain
you speak too slowly, let them wait. They'll learn:
The gift of speech is how we know we're not beasts,
but even beasts are better civilized
than those who ignore this gift's proper use.

Glass beads in the jewelers' bazaar are not worth a barley corn; in the presence of the sun, even the brightest lamp will fail to shine; and who will call a minaret's height lofty if the tower is placed at the foot of Mount Alvend? Just so, the nobles of my lord's court are pious men and profound scholars. How could I dare to speak in their presence? If in the passion of the moment, like a child trying to speak with his parents as an equal, I were to add something of my own to what they had to say, my thoughts would be revealed as simplistic trifles, paltry imitations of their subtle and supple ideas.

A man whose claim to knowledge is pretense
makes for his enemies an easy target.
Saadi has fallen into a hermit's life.
Who bothers to attack a fallen man?
Deliberate in silence first, then speak.
Lay a strong foundation; then build the wall.

When Loqman the philosopher³⁴ was asked where he had learned his wisdom, he replied, “From the blind, who always check the ground in front of them before they take a step.”

Walk the length of your virility first.
Then find a wife who'll live within its bounds.
A cock who battles fearlessly in war
will dull his claws on the breast of a bronze falcon.
The cat who is a lion chasing mice
is a mouse in combat with a tiger.

Nonetheless, trusting that the great men of the Shah's court will be generous and discrete, choosing not to see the faults of those beneath them and keeping silent about the crimes their inferiors have committed, I have devoted a portion of my precious life to setting down in this book, in a shortened form, some rare events, stories, poems and tales of our ancient kings.

Long after we have crumbled into dust,
and the wind has claimed the grains of who we were,
these words, well chosen and arranged, will live,
and in them alone my spirit will endure,
unless, one day, compassion moves a man of faith
to offer a prayer for the work of darvishes.

I gave the *Gulistan* its present form when I realized I needed to shorten what I'd written so that those who wander its luxuriant paths will feel themselves in paradise, which has eight entrances, just as my book has eight chapters:

- I. Padeshahan (*Kings*)
- II. Darvishan (*Darvishes*)
- III. Ghena'at (*Contentment*)
- IV. Khamooshi (*Silence*)
- V. Eshgh va Javani (*Love and Youth*)

-
- VI. *Za'af va Piri (Weakness and Old Age)*
- VII. *Ta'alim va Tarbiyat (Education)*
- VIII. *Adab'eh Soh'bat (Principles of Social Conduct)*

The Hejret³⁵ was six-hundred-fifty-six
when I put down my pen, a year of peace.
I wanted nothing but to give advice.
I gave it, entrusted you to God, and left.

PADESHAHAN

KINGS

Story 1

The condemned prisoner chose not to beg for mercy. Instead, in his native tongue, he called curse after curse down upon the head of the king, defiling the air around us with his words. As I stood there with nothing to do but listen, I remembered these lines:

A man confronting death who gives up hope
holds back nothing when he speaks. His tongue
grows long,³⁶ and in the fierceness of his despair,
like a cornered cat attacking a dog,
he throws himself on his enemy's drawn sword.

When the king asked what the prisoner was saying, one of his viziers, a kind-hearted and merciful man, stepped forward. "My Lord, the prisoner has quoted from the Quran the verse that praises: '...those who suppress their anger and pardon their fellowmen; [for] God loves those who are upright and do good.'"³⁷ On hearing his advisor's explanation, the king was so moved by what he believed to be the man's piety that he stayed the execution on the spot.

A second vizier who was also standing with us, a bitter rival of the first, confronted his colleague, "The king looks to us for guidance. When he asks, men of our rank should speak nothing but the truth." Then he turned to the king, "The prisoner insulted your majesty, cursing you with words not fit for royal ears."

"I prefer the lie your colleague told to this truth that you would use to discredit him," the king replied. "He was trying to make peace; peace is the farthest thing from your mind. Our sages have said it this way: 'A lie that harmonizes dissonance is better than a truth that produces discord.'"

Pity that men whose words shape the shah's actions
 hobble their tongues, refusing to speak the good.
 Read the inscription in Feridun's³⁸ hall:
 "In the end, my brother, the world will not hold you.
 Become, therefore, inseparable from God.
 The trust you place in what you own betrays you.
 Creation kills what it was made to love.
 In the moments before your soul leaves you,
 are you a king or a man condemned to die?"

Story 2

In the dream, all that remained of Sultan Mahmud's body were his eyes, which moved inside the space where his head should have been like planets turning in their orbits. The rest of him was gone, dissolved to dust in the hundred years since his death. The king of Khorasan asked his sages to interpret this vision for him. They could not.

A darvish who happened to be walking by overheard what the men of the royal court were discussing. He offered the appropriate greetings and joined them. "The Sultan," he said, "still cannot accept that his kingdom is no longer his."

At death, the flesh unravels into words:
voice, muscle, bones; liver, heart, lungs. Just so,
 the earth has swallowed our most famous men,
 leaving us with nothing but their names.
 Nushirvan's³⁹ been gone for centuries,
 and still we measure justice by his deeds.
 You who sweep the floors or shovel shit,
 your lives also will be measured.
 If you want more from life after you die
 than *Pity he's dead. What was his name?*,
 mark the world with good before you leave it.

Story 7

The king couldn't take it anymore. On board the ship with him was a slave who'd never been to sea and whose fear of the vessel's rocking was so great that he wouldn't stop crying no matter what kindness was done for or promised to him. A philosopher who was also on board could see that the king's patience had reached its limit and offered to help the slave be quiet. The king said he would consider this a great favor, and so the wise man ordered some sailors standing nearby to throw the slave into the sea and not to pull him in until they were sure he'd swallowed several mouthfuls of the salty water. Unable to swim, certain he was going to drown, the slave thrashed about in a panic until the philosopher gave the order and the sailors pulled the man by his hair back to the boat. He clung to the stern of the ship, sputtering till he caught his breath, and then climbed onto the deck, where he sat quietly in a corner by himself.

Deeply confused by what he'd just seen, the king asked the philosopher for an explanation. "Once he got a taste of his own drowning," the sage replied, "he understood the safety provided by the boat. No one appreciates the protection he has more than one who loses it."

You with a full belly, does barley bread
offend your taste? Do you find my sweetheart
ugly? Remember that in paradise
the houris⁴⁰ fear purgatory as hell;
and from hell, purgatory looks like paradise.

Story 8

When he was asked what crime his father's viziers had committed, Hormuzd replied, "None. I put these men in jail because they feared my power without respecting it. I knew that to protect themselves from the capriciousness they saw in me and the harm they thought might come to them because of it, they might try to

kill me. So I had no choice. I took the advice of the sages, who said:

“The power to wipe out a hundred men
 should not replace your fear of one who fears you.
 Watch when a cat is fighting for its life;
 it plucks the tiger’s eyes out with its claws.
 To stop the stone the shepherd *might* throw down
 to crush its head, the viper bites, and lives.”

Story 9

The soldier kneeling before the king gave this report: The fort had been taken; the enemy’s forces were prisoners of war. By his majesty’s good fortune, the entire district was now pacified and subject to his rule.

He was an Arab king, sick with old age and waiting to die. “This message is not for me,” he sighed deeply, “but for my true enemies, the heirs to my throne.”

I’ve lived until the end of my desires,
 each one fulfilled according to my wish,
 but now I’m old, tired, and I can hear,
 in each breath I have left, Fate’s hand striking
 Death’s drum in the rhythm of my dying.
 The pleasures of my past will not return.
 The time I spent on them has realized me
 no profit. Eyes, bid this head farewell.
 Palm, forearm, the fingers of my hand,
 take leave of each other. You who were my friends
 come close one last time. This life I leave
 leaves in its wake only ignorance.
 I have accomplished nothing. Be on your guard.

Story 10

An Arab king who was notorious for his cruelty came on a pilgrimage to the cathedral mosque of Damascus, where he offered the following prayer, clearly seeking God's assistance in a matter of some urgency:

"The darvish, poor, owning nothing, the man
whose money buys him anything he wants,
here, on this floor, enslaved, we are equals.
Nonetheless, the man who has the most
comes before You bearing the greater need."

When the king was done praying, he noticed me immersed in my own prayers at the head of the prophet Yahia's⁴¹ tomb. The monarch turned to me, "I know that God favors you darvishes because you are passionate in your worship and honest in the way you live your lives. I fear a powerful enemy, but if you add your prayers to mine, I am sure that God will protect me for your sake."

"Have mercy on the weak among your own people," I replied, "and no one will be able to defeat you."

To break each of a poor man's ten fingers
just because you have the strength offends God.
Show compassion to those who fall before you,
and others will extend their hands when you are down.
The man who plants bad seed hallucinates
if he expects sweet fruit at harvest time.
Take the cotton from your ears! Give
your people justice before justice finds you.
All men and women are to each other
the limbs of a single body, each of us
created from the life God gave to Adam.
When time's passage withers you to nothing,
I will grieve as if I'd lost a leg;
but you, who will not feel another's pain,
you've lost the right to call yourself human.

Story 11

A darvish whose prayers were known to be answered by God⁴² walked past where Hejaj Yusuf⁴³ was standing. “Pray for my welfare,” the governor ordered the darvish, who responded immediately, “Dear God, take this man’s life.”

“For God’s sake, what kind of a prayer is that?”

“A good one. For you, and for all Muslims.”

For how much longer will you rule by force,
torturing and killing your subjects?
What pleasure do you get from it?
Better God should strike you where you stand
than let you live to cause more people pain.

Story 12

An unjust king asked a pious man’s advice about the best way to worship God. “For you,” the man replied, “it would be best to sleep half the day, reducing by half the harm you do to your people.”

I saw a tyrant sleeping half the day.
“If sleep can clear his mind,” I said, “it’s good;
but if his slumber does not change him, perhaps
he shouldn’t wake. Better dead than a despot.

Story 16

The economy was tight. Jobs were scarce. My friend was complaining that the money he managed to scrape together from the work he could find was not enough to support his family. He was thinking, he said, of moving to another country, where he could do what he had to do to make a living and not worry that anyone he knew would find out if the work happened to be shameful.

It happens all the time: a hungry man
goes to sleep anonymous and alone.
A man's soul waits between his lips to leave,⁴⁴
and no one gathers there to weep for him.

My friend also worried that his enemies were laughing at him behind his back, telling others he was not man enough to find the work that he needed. He told me what he thought they were saying:

“Look at him! He's so pitiful and honorless!
He knows he'll never be rich. Still, he'd choose
a life of luxury for himself alone
and leave his wife and kids to live in misery.

Then my friend asked me, since I knew he was good with numbers, if I could get him a job in the shah's palace. It would be, he said, a favor he knew he could never repay, but he would happily remain indebted to me for the rest of his life if I could make such a thing happen for him.

“Listen,” I said, “working for the king is a mixed blessing at best. On the one hand, you will earn more money than you could otherwise hope for. On the other hand, the politics of the royal palace can cost you your life. The risk is not worth the money.

The tax collector knows a poor man's house
has neither land nor garden worth taxing.
Carry poverty's grief with dignity,
or bear your children, *jigar-band*⁴⁵, to the crows.

“That's not very helpful,” my friend replied, “and it doesn't answer the question I asked you. Besides, haven't you heard the saying, ‘At God's final accounting, the treacherous have the most to fear?’”

“None who travel the straight road get lost;
it leads them inexorably towards God.

“Our sages,” my friend continued, “name four people who live their lives in fear of four others: a bandit lives in fear of the sultan; a thief, in fear of the palace guard; adulterers fear no one more than the person who will reveal their illicit affairs; and a prostitute trembles at the thought of the muhtasib.⁴⁶ If your conscience is clear, you have no reason to be afraid.

“If you want to see your enemies embarrassed
by each slur they’ve tried to taint you with,
wear the mantle of your office modestly
and carry out your duties with a pure heart.
When you leave, you will have nothing to fear.
The king’s launderers beat against stones
only his most deeply stained garments.”

I asked my friend if he knew the story of the fox who, when people asked him why he was running away from the palace, explained, “I have heard that camels are being forced into the king’s service.”

“Don’t be foolish!” they replied. “You are not a camel; you don’t look anything like a camel; how could anyone possibly mistake you for a camel?”

“Shh! Keep your voices down!” The fox looked warily from side to side, as if he might have been followed. “If my enemies tell the king’s guard that I am a camel, and the king’s guard catches me, who will dare to speak in my defense? Which guard will have the courage to trust his own eyes and release me? I would be like the man who was bitten by a cobra, waiting while the poison worked through him for the antidote to come from Iraq. I’d die before it reached me.”

When I finished the story, I turned to my friend, “You are an honest and honorable man, but you are also naïve. Enemies and competitors you don’t even know you have are waiting in the palace to sabotage the career you are asking me to help you start. If they accuse you of some wrongdoing, and you are called before the shah to defend yourself, and the shah admonishes you despite your innocence, which one of your colleagues do you think will put his own career at risk to help you? Stop thinking about a career in gov-

ernment. You're better off accepting your situation as it is. As our sages have said:

Infinite treasure waits beneath the waves
for the foolhardy few who dare to claim it,
but if you value safety and your life,
you can be sure of them only ashore."

"This is your advice?!" My friend's face grew tense with disappointment and anger. "This is the legendary wisdom of Saadi? I guess what the philosophers say is true: It's in prison, when you have nothing, that you find out who your friends really are, because when your table is set for a meal, even your enemies are your friends.

"The man who embraces you when life is good
and calls himself your adopted brother
and boasts that he alone is your true friend,
is not. Your friend, when you are destitute,
seeks you out, helps you stand with dignity,
and doesn't turn his back when you need him."

Since it was clear I would not be able to convince my friend that I was in fact looking out for his best interests, I went to see the President of the State Council, with whom I had been on good terms for a long time. I explained my friend's situation to him and, as a favor to me, he found my friend a minor post in the palace. Quickly, in what seemed like no time at all, my friend's talent for accounting and his ability to get along well with people earned him a promotion. Then another promotion followed, and another, and still another, until he'd managed to achieve the height of his ambition: he was made a personal advisor to his majesty the sultan. I was thrilled for my friend, and also relieved, since he seemed to have secured for himself a position in which he would be safe. I sent him these lines:

Put the heartbreak of your past aside;
don't let palace intrigue make you anxious.

Remember, the spring of life hides in darkness.⁴⁷
 Do not grieve, my brother, that you've known pain;
 God conceals from us our future rewards.
 Nor should you sulk that you suffered for so long.
 Patience may be bitter on the tongue,
 but it bears the sweetest fruit nonetheless.

Around that time, some acquaintances and I made a pilgrimage to Mecca. When I returned, my friend came out to greet me even before I'd reached the city gates. His face was drawn and haggard, and he was dressed in the robes of a darvish, suggesting he was even poorer than he'd been before his success in the palace. When I asked him how this came to be, he replied, "It happened just the way you said it would. One of my enemies at the court accused me of treason, and when the king ordered no investigation—because he chose to believe me guilty—no one who had previously supported me was willing to speak in my defense.

"When a man possesses title and station,
 people genuflect and rush to praise him,
 but if he loses his position, they laugh,
 clamoring to place their feet on his head.

"Just a few days ago, when news of your group's return from Mecca reached the palace, the king granted me an amnesty, but not before he'd first confiscated everything I owned."

I couldn't help myself. "You should have listened to me when I compared working for the king to traveling the ocean. Each is simultaneously profitable and dangerous. You took the risk and you lost.

You either carry gold in both hands to the shore,
 or the waves leave you lying on the shore, dead as gold.

I did not, however, want to pour more salt into my friend's wounds, so I stopped myself after reciting these two couplets:

Didn't you know you'd see yourself in chains
 for refusing the good advice of one who cared?

If you cannot bear the pain of the sting,
keep your fingers out of the scorpion's hole.

Story 18

The prince inherited his father's fortune. His impulse to generosity, though, was his own, which he satisfied by showering gifts on his military and his subjects.

A tray of lignam aloes has no scent,
though a slow flame will coax perfume from them.
If you want your people to call you great,
be generous; unsown seeds don't grow.

An advisor who thought the prince was behaving rashly tried to caution him: "Your father and his father, and his father before him, accumulated this wealth for a reason. Disasters strike. Enemies attack from behind. You will see neither of them coming. What kind of a ruler leaves himself without money to pay for what he needs at times like those?"

Scatter your great wealth throughout the land
and each home will be one grain of rice richer.
Better you should take from each home a barley-
corn of silver and let your treasure grow.

The prince turned his face away, "God gave me this country to rule through pleasure and generosity, not deprivation and stinginess."

Qarun possessed forty treasure houses,
yet the earth swallowed him to end his greed.⁴⁸
Nushirvan's name lives still on people's lips.
His generosity keeps him from death.

Story 19

This is how I heard the story: The hunting party had stopped to eat, but there was no salt to season the meat they were roasting for Nushirvan, and no one wanted to serve him an improperly seasoned meal. So they sent one of the boys who was with them to get some salt from a nearby village. Before the boy left, however, Nushirvan told him, "Make sure you pay for what you take. Otherwise, the village will be ruined." Surprised and more than a little incredulous, those who were standing nearby asked how such a simple thing as bringing some salt to the king could have such profound consequences. Nushirvan replied, "When the world began, oppression was a small hut that few people entered, but as more and more people chose to go inside, they built it up, and look how high it reaches now."

To please the king who eats a single apple
 from a subject's garden, his slaves will pull
 the tree up whole to plant in the palace yard;
 and if he lets five eggs be taken by force,
 his army will commandeer a thousand birds.
 Tyrants die. The curses on them do not.

Story 20

Philosophers say that if you offend God to find favor in another man's eyes, God will use that man to bring about your own destruction. Here is the story of someone who chose to ignore this wisdom. He was an official in the king's court, a cruel and heartless man who would tear people's houses down searching for anything of value to add to the royal treasury.

The smoke that rises from burning wild rue⁴⁹
 is nothing next to the black clouds billowing
 from the hearts this man left smoldering in his wake.

The lion is the prince of beasts; the ass, the lowliest peasant. Nonetheless, wise men agree that an ass who bears the loads placed on his back is better than a lion who destroys men.

We value beasts of burden for their work,
not their intellect. The ass that carries
what we cannot, the ox as well, are more
human than men who break their subjects' backs.

When word reached the king of how cruelly this official had been treating the people, he had the man put on the rack and tortured to death.

You will not earn the sultan's praise unless
you earn first the praise of those he rules.
If you want God to overlook your sins,
treat others as the divine creations they are.

One of the people whose homes the man had destroyed passed by where he was being tortured and said:

"You used your strength and your authority
as if they granted you impunity.
They did not. A hard bone can be swallowed,
but the belly won't escape its sharp edges."

Story 27

A great wrestler became infatuated with one of his students. So taken was the master with the youth's form and grace that he made the boy his apprentice, teaching him all but one of the three hundred sixty moves that a master wrestler must know. Over time, the student's strength and skill increased until he was able to defeat anyone who challenged him, and he began to think that he could defeat his teacher as well.

"I will not challenge my master," the young man declared before the sultan, "out of respect for his age, and because I am grate-

ful for his instruction, but I am at least as strong as he is, and I have achieved his level of skill.”

The young man’s insolence angered the king, who ordered that a wrestling match between teacher and student should take place as soon as possible. An appropriately large arena was set up; the king and his entourage seated themselves within it; and the contest began. The student attacked with the fury of a mad elephant, his speed and strength enough to uproot a mountain of brass. The master, who knew he could not rely on his strength alone, counter-attacked with the move he had reserved for himself during his student’s training. Since the student did not know the move, he could not block it, and he found himself being lifted by his master high into the air and then thrown ignominiously to the ground. He was defeated. The spectators cheered, and the king showered the victor with rewards. Then the king turned to the student, chastising him for his pride and arrogance and belittling him for having been unable to defeat his master.

“My lord,” the youth replied, “my master defeated me not because he is stronger than I am but because he withheld from me during my training the small sliver of knowledge that he used against me today. Had it not been for that move, I would have won.”

“I did not teach you that move,” the master said, “because I knew the day would come when you would challenge me. As our sages have said, ‘Never reveal your full self, not even to your friend. Should he become your enemy, you will have taught him how to defeat you.’ Have you not heard the words of the teacher whose student betrayed him:

‘I cannot tell: Does loyalty exist?
Or do people no longer practice it?
Each student who learns archery from me
pays me back by making me a target.’”

Story 28

A darvish sitting by himself in the desert was so immersed in his own thoughts that he did not notice the sultan who happened to be passing by and therefore failed to acknowledge the royal presence. The sultan was so angry, he spit the words out, "These rag-wearing darvishes are no better than beasts."

The royal vizier turned to the darvish, "This is the sultan! Ruler of the earth. Where are your manners?"

The darvish replied, "First, tell the king he should expect 'proper obeisance' only from those hoping for some benefit from him. Second, remind him that kings exist to protect their subjects; subjects do not exist to obey the king."

The darvish owns nothing. Nonetheless,
asking nothing in return, the shah protects him.
The sheep is not to glorify the shepherd;
the shepherd's glory lies in service to the sheep.
You see here two men you must choose between:
one whose life surrounds him with great wealth,
the other bearing only his wounded heart.
Wait, in a few days, this earth we stand on
will consume the brain in a prophet's head.
God's decree, which none of us escapes,
does not distinguish between king and slave.
Open the graves where the dead are buried.
Can you tell who was rich and who was poor?

Pleased by what the darvish said, the king asked him if he wanted anything, and the darvish answered that all he wanted was to be left alone. Before granting this request, though, the king asked the darvish for advice, and the darvish said:

Know it now: the wealth you hold in your hand,
your kingdom, all of it, will fall away,
leaving you, as you leave this life, empty-handed.

Story 29

A vizier came to ask Zулnun Misri for advice. “No matter how hard I work to serve the shah,” the vizier said, “and I work day and night to be worthy of whatever reward he might choose to give me, I live nonetheless always in fear that he will choose to punish me instead.”

Tears ran down Zулnun’s cheeks as he replied, “If only I had feared God as you fear the king; I would now be counted among the righteous.”

If he did not know reward and punishment
wait for him in the world to come, the darvish
could plant his foot firmly on heaven’s sphere;⁵⁰
and if this vizier feared almighty God
the way he fears his king, he would not need
advice: God would have made him an angel.⁵¹

Story 37

When Nushirvan the just heard that God had removed one of his enemies from the world, he turned to the person who’d brought him the news and asked, “Have you heard whether God has plans not to take me?”

Don’t celebrate when your enemy dies.
Your life also will not last forever.

Story 39

After he had defeated the Egyptians in battle and accepted their surrender, Harun-ur-Rashid decided to teach his new subjects a lesson. “Egypt’s rulers called themselves gods,” he said, “and so they were arrogant enough to challenge me. Now they will be ruled by the lowest of my slaves,” and he made Khosaib, a stupid negro, Egypt’s new governor. Khosaib, however, was so stupid that when

a group of farmers came to him for help because the cotton they'd planted on the banks of the Nile had been destroyed by heavy rains, he replied, "You should have planted wool instead."

A pious man heard what Khosaib said and recited these lines:

"If knowledge were the measure of all wealth,
the ignorant would live in poverty.
Yet here is a man who should be starving,
and his prosperity leaves the wise speechless—
which proves that getting rich is not a skill,
and who knows why God granted him such luck?
It happens: Sages must stand aside like beggars
for stupid men who are given royal robes.
If an alchemist dies bitter in his failure,⁵²
know that somewhere a fool found gold in the trash."

DARVISHAN

DARVISHES

Story 1

They asked one of the truly holy men of their time what he thought about a religious recluse whom others had criticized. He replied, “Outwardly, the man has no flaws that I can see, nor do I know of any that taint him inwardly.”

Consider a man in religious dress
religious, and therefore good; and if you don't
know enough to judge his character,
don't play the muhtasib⁵³ inside his house.

Story 2

I watched the darvish groan as he pressed his forehead to the threshold of the Kaba,⁵⁴ “O merciful, forgiving God, You know how little a man like me can offer You.”

Obedience should be its own reward.
Worship otherwise and it mars your prayers.
Sinners ask forgiveness for their sins;
arifs,⁵⁵ for their imperfect devotion.

“Religious men,” the darvish continued, “wait to be rewarded for doing what they're told, like merchants setting prices in the market. I have come to beg, not to trade, and so it is my hope I place before You, not the balance sheet of my compliance with Your law. Deal with me as you see fit.

"I am your slave to kill or to forgive.
 Because I am your slave, they are the same."
 I heard a beggar approach the Kaba's door,
 and he was crying, and through his tears he prayed:
 "I'm not asking You for any reward;
 I wish only to have my sins erased."

Story 3

I saw A'bd-u-Qader Gaillani⁵⁶ praying with his face to the ground in the sanctuary of the Kaba, "Forgive my sins, O Lord, but if I must be punished, let my punishment be to rise blind on the day of resurrection so that I will not be shamed by the gaze of the righteous."

I wake each morning face down in the dirt
 of helplessness, but as soon as I know
 who and where I am, I ask, "You
 whose presence I cannot escape, are You
 conscious at all that I, your slave, am here?"

Story 4

The thief was frustrated. He'd searched every spot he could think of in the pious man's house but had found nothing worth stealing. Just as he was about to give up and try another house, however, he stumbled over a blanket someone had left on the floor. He felt better; here at least was something he could take. What he didn't know was that it was the blanket the pious man had been sleeping on and that he'd thrown it there so the thief would not leave his home disappointed.

It's true: men of God take great care
 protecting even their enemies' feelings.
 You who wage war against your friends,
 how will such dignity ever be yours?

True friends are not the type to gossip viciously behind your back and then swear to your face that they would die for you if necessary.

Beware those who in your presence
are innocent lambs; in your absence,
they're likely to be man-eating wolves.

Someone who finds pleasure in telling you the faults of others will find that same pleasure listing your faults for them.

Story 5

"It is," I said to the men who had just refused my request to join them in their travels, "wrong to turn your noses up at the thought of a poor man sharing your journey. I've always heard that men of your standing are better than that. But you also aren't thinking clearly: I can be of service to you. I may not own a beast to help carry your supplies, but I myself am strong enough to carry your blankets."

"Please don't be insulted," one of them responded, "but a few days ago a thief disguised as a darvish also asked to join us, and since none of us would think to doubt the khergheh,⁵⁷ we received him as a friend."

Only we know who we are beneath our clothes.
Only the writer knows his book's true subject.
Arifs announce themselves through what they wear,
and we think what they wear proves who they are,
but the work of *being* good is *doing* good;
of holiness, surrendering desire.
Neither taj nor flag will save you from your lust.⁵⁸
All conquest roots itself in manliness.
What use are weapons to a man who isn't one?

"One night," he continued, "after a full day of hard traveling, we set up camp near a fort. Sensing an opportunity, the thief picked up the aftabeh⁵⁹ belonging to the man sitting next to him

and said that he was going to wash himself before prayers. Once he was out of our sight, however, he went instead to see what there was of value in the fort.

“This thief who hid his thievery beneath
a darvish’s khergheh, it was as if
he used the Kaba’s robes to cover an ass.

“He broke into one of the towers in the fort and stole a container full of goods. By sunrise, he was gone.

“Perhaps because they’d found the aftabeh, the authorities from the fort assumed we were the thieves, and they threw us into prison, despite the fact that we did not have the stolen goods in our possession. Eventually, either because they decided we were innocent or because they couldn’t prove our guilt, they let us go. Since then we have refused all who ask to join us. As the wise have said, “To guarantee your safety, keep to yourself.””

One man’s dishonor dishonors his whole tribe.
No one escapes, not even among animals.
Haven’t you seen how a single ox gone wild
can untame a village’s entire herd?

When he finished speaking, I replied, “Praise God, for even though I have tended lately not to associate with darvishes, through your story I have received a small portion of their blessing. You have taught me a lesson today that I will remember for the rest of my life:

“All it takes is one unshaven man
to sour the wise men in their majlis.⁶⁰
Imagine a pure, rose-water-filled lake,
and a small dog falls in, defiling it.

Story 6

Despite the fact that he was an invited guest, the ascetic ate less from the shah's table than he wanted, and so he was still hungry when the plates had been cleared away. Then, later, when it was time to pray, he prayed longer than he usually did, hoping to impress the shah with his piety.

O desert Arab, you seek the Kaba,
but the road you've chosen leads to Turkestan.⁶¹

When the ascetic returned home, he was still hungry, so he asked his son to set the table. "Didn't you eat with the Sultan?" the boy asked.

"I ate, but not enough," the father replied. "I had my reasons."

"Then you need to say your prayers again as well, for whatever prayers you said are as empty as your stomach."

Display your virtues on your open palms,
hide your faults beneath your simple robes—
your vanity fools no one but yourself.
On the day true hardship overtakes you,
what will you buy with your counterfeit silver?

Story 7

When I was a child, all I cared about was proving my piety, and so I became addicted to prayer and abstinence, often keeping vigil through the night. One time, I was sitting with my father, holding the Quran in my lap, watching the people around us as they slept. "These people are sleeping," I said, "but they might as well be dead. Not one of them has roused himself to offer a prayer."

My father replied, "My son, it would be better for you too to sleep than to spend these hours criticizing others."

The outward form of piety is pretense,
blinding one who thinks it is enough

to all but his own imagined saintliness;
but if he were for one moment granted
eyes with which to see the world filled with God,
he'd know no one is weaker than he is.

Story 8

In response to the praise being heaped upon him by the people he was with, the great man raised his head and said, "I am as I know myself to be."

You who list my virtues one by one,
please stop, you're hurting me: The traits you name
are those that all can see. You do not know
the others lying hidden in my heart.
When people look at me, they perceive a man
who does what's right, and so I please their eyes,
but underneath that surface I am evil,
and ashamed, and I walk with my head held low.
I am like the peacock, praised for the colors
of his tail, but ashamed of his ugly feet.

Story 13

Once, when I was walking along the seashore, I saw a holy man who had been wounded by a tiger. No medicine could relieve his pain, but he offered God this thanks over and over again, "Praise be to Allah that I have fallen into this great hardship and not into sin."

If that beloved Friend decrees my death
should come to me from someone else's hand,
I will not with my last breath grieve for life
or beg to have my transgressions explained.
My grief will be that I offended You.

Story 14

A darvish who had fallen on hard times was caught stealing a blanket from another darvish's home. When the judge sentenced the thief to have his right hand cut off, the blanket's owner attempted to intercede, saying, "I have forgiven him."

The judge replied, "That may be so, but your forgiveness is not enough for me to set the law aside."

"You are right," the second darvish answered, "except that this law does not apply in cases where what has been stolen belongs to a religious trust. Such property has no owner. So, since a darvish keeps everything he has in trust for the poor, which means he actually own nothing, no theft has been committed."

This reasoning impressed the judge, who ordered the prisoner to be released, saying, "Has your world grown so narrow that you have no one to steal from but your friend?"

"Have you not heard the saying," the newly freed darvish replied, "Better to sweep out the house of a friend than to knock at your enemy's door."

When hardship overwhelms you, don't despair.
Flay your enemies if you have to,
but take from your friends only their fur coats.

Story 15

A padshah asked a holy man, "When desire for this world fills you, do you ever think of me and the gifts I could bestow?"

The holy man replied, "Only when I forget God."

The one God chases from His door chases
everywhere in search of what he wants.
The one God calls to enter is done chasing.

Story 16

In his dream, the pious man saw a padshah in paradise and a darvish in hell. Since he had always assumed the fates of such men would be the opposite, he wondered aloud how what he saw in his dream had come to pass. A voice answered him, “The padshah was rewarded for his love of darvishes; the darvish was punished for associating with padshahs.”

Your patchwork robe and your tasbih⁶² mean nothing.
 What matters is to cleanse yourself of evil
 for then you will not need that cap of leaves.⁶³
 A true darvish can wear a Tartar’s cap.⁶⁴

Story 17

Bareheaded and without shoes, a darvish who had traveled on foot from Kufah with the Hejaz caravan joined us on our pilgrimage to Mecca. He strutted as he walked, reciting these verses about himself:

“I neither am nor bear a camel’s load.
 I neither rule nor bow to anyone.
 I do not grieve for what I do not have
 or worry that I cannot change the past.
 Each breath I draw is free of care, as is my life.”

A wealthy man riding comfortably on a camel called out to him, “Where are you going? You’d better turn back. The journey is hard and it will kill you.” The darvish walked with us into the desert as if the man had never spoken.

By the time we reached the palms of Mahmud⁶⁵, the rich man was on his death bed. The darvish said to him, “The hardships did not kill me, but you, who rode at ease on your camel’s back, are going to die.”

A man cried all night at his best friend's sick bed.
At dawn, the friend rose with the sun. The man died.
The fastest horses fall dead on the road,
while the hobbled mule completes its journey alive.
Death often welcomes the healthy into the earth
and leaves the wounded to die another day.

Story 18

The padshah's invitation had made the hermit nervous. He was afraid he would not make a good enough impression, so he took a drug he thought would weaken him, giving him the appearance of a man who spent all his time in prayer and meditation. They say, however, that the drug turned out to be lethal and the man died when he took it.

He led you to believe inside his shell
he was like a pistachio, solid,
but once you peeled that first layer away,
he was an onion, nothing but skin after skin.
Those who seek for their piety this world's
reward pray with their backs to the Qiblah.⁶⁶
When you call upon God, God is all you should know.

Story 19

The merchants sat on the ground in Greece where their caravan had been attacked by robbers, crying, imploring God and the prophet to help them recover the tremendous wealth they had lost. Nothing happened.

When a thief's dark deed darkens his victims' world,
he plunders as if he does not hear their cries.

One of the merchants turned to Loqman the philosopher who happened to be traveling with them and said, "Please, speak to the thieves. Perhaps you can persuade them to return even a small por-

tion of what they have taken. Otherwise, all our wealth will have gone to waste. You are wise. Surely they will listen to you.”

Loqman replied, “To speak even one word to the likes of them would be an even greater waste.”

Rust-eaten iron can't be polished smooth.
 Nor can an iron nail be hammered into rock.
 How will mere words transform a thief's black heart?
 Better to use your wealth to help the poor
 and earn yourself protection from evil.
 When a beggar asks for money, give it,
 or be prepared to lose it to a thief.

Story 20

The first pleasures of my youth were just beginning to open in me, and my desire was strong, and so when my mentor, Sheikh Abdulfaraj Ben Juzi⁶⁷ criticized my love of music and urged me instead to devote myself, in solitude, to prayer and meditation, I chose to ignore his wisdom and went instead, as often as possible, to precisely the kinds of parties of which he disapproved. I justified myself with words like these:

If the qazi were here, even he'd rise to dance;⁶⁸
 if the muhtasib were sipping wine with us,
 he'd know our joy and excuse our drunkenness.

That was how I lived until the night I heard the musician whose performance changed my life.

It was as if he used his bow to shred
 a vital artery. It was as if
 his voice emptied your ears of all pleasure,
 worse than a man's keening at his father's death.

Some in the audience put their fingers in their ears; others, to their lips to silence him. It was as if they were saying:

Sweet music invites us to ecstasy;
your song is sweet only when it stops.
This performance pleases no one, so please
put your instrument aside. Go home.
We will applaud your footsteps as you leave.
For my part, when the man began to sing
I turned to the host, "For God's sake, give me
cotton to stop this torture of my hearing
or open the door so I can escape.

My friends, though, insisted that I stay, so I did, remaining
there for the entire night. When the sun rose, I said:

This is not the hour to call us to prayer.
The muezzin must have lost count in the dark.
Ask my eyelids how long the night has been.
They did not once cloak my eyes in sleep.

As I prepared to leave, I took the turban from my head and a
dinar from my belt and placed them in gratitude at the musician's
feet. I embraced him and told him how much I'd appreciated his
performance. My friends, however, did not believe I was sincere
and laughed to themselves at the joke they thought I was making at
the performer's expense. When they saw that I was serious, though,
one of them began to argue with me, accusing me of being a hypo-
crite, and asking how I could give my turban, a symbol of wisdom
and learning, and my money, to a man "whose audiences had never
once placed even a single dirhem⁶⁹ in his palm or a gold coin in his
daf.⁷⁰

"A musician?! He'll soon be far from here.
He's never asked to play the same place twice.
The squawk that was the first note of his song
raised each hair on each of us who came to hear,
and the birds who'd perched themselves up on the roof
flew off in terror. None of us could think
when he performed. We feared his throat would burst."

“Don’t be so quick to judge,” I replied. “It took all night, but this man’s talent has at last become evident to me.”

With pronounced sarcasm, my friend asked me to explain what I meant so that he could explain it to the others. If they owed the performer an apology for the jokes they’d been making about him, then they wanted to understand precisely what they were apologizing for.

“I have always ignored my sheikh’s advice to give up my love of music,” I said. “But fate, or luck, has brought me here tonight, for after hearing this man perform, I have decided to follow the path my sheikh has shown me and to stop going to parties where music will be performed.”

A pleasing voice enchants all who hear its song,
and even those who only hear it speak;
but the tender melodies that lovers sing
when they draw the curtain around them, or the dirges
mournful for Imam Hussein, or the lyrics
that come to us from Hejaz—none of these,
if the singer’s voice is flat, can be called music.

Story 21

They asked Loqman, “Who taught you manners?”

He replied, “Those who had none. When they did something that seemed to me uncivil, I made sure not to do it.”

Wise men learn from every word that’s spoken,
even jokes and empty flattery,
but read to a fool one hundred chapters
of wisdom and all he’ll hear are punch lines.

Story 25

They asked one of the sheikhs of Syria, “What is the true nature of Sufism?”

He replied, "Sufis are those who once appeared unsettled in the world but were really quite content. Now, however, they appear content, but are deeply unsettled."

If you chase each hour some new desire,
no solitude will ever bring you peace;
but even should your wealth exceed all hope,
you'll only find tranquility with God.

Story 28

The king knew he was dying. Since he had no heir, he ordered that on the morning after his death the crown should be passed on to the first person to walk through the city gates. That person happened to be a beggar who'd been surviving for most of his life on the crumbs people gave him each day and whose clothing had become nothing more than the patches he'd sewn upon the patches with which he'd once repaired his original garments.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the officers and nobles of the court did as their dead sovereign had instructed and they made the beggar their ruler.

His reign was not a peaceful one. Not long after he took the throne, a group of local governors disavowed their oaths of loyalty, and the neighboring monarchs began to prepare their armies for war. Then his own troops deserted him, and his subjects rebelled, taking a portion of his kingdom for their own.

In the midst of all this turmoil, one of the beggar-king's old friends, a darvish with whom the king had traveled before he was made king, returned from a journey. "Thank God," he told the king, "your rose has at last blossomed from out of the thorns, and the thorn that once gave you such pain when you walked has been pulled from your foot. Great luck and good fortune have brought you to where you are now. Enjoy your prosperity. Hardship always gives way to comfort, just like winter always gives way to spring.

A flower blooms and withers and blooms again.
A tree stands nude, waiting. The world clothes it.

“My friend,” the king replied, “what I need now is sympathy, not congratulations. The last time you saw me all I had to worry about was where I’d get my bread for the day. Now, a world’s worth of trouble hangs over me and I am about to be crushed.”

Without wealth, I grieve my poverty.
 With wealth, my love for what I have traps me.
 The things of this world are a curse. Possess them
 or not, they bring nothing but adversity.
 If you desire power, desire nothing
 but contentment, which is its own kingdom.
 If a rich man pours gold into your lap,
 don’t thank him. I’ve often heard wise men say,
 “A darvish’s patience holds greater wealth
 than any gift a wealthy man might give.”⁷²

Story 29

A man had not seen his friend, who was the padshah’s devan,⁷³ for a long time. When someone asked him why, he said, “I don’t want to.”

A member of the devan’s family heard this and was surprised, “How as the devan insulted you that you no longer wish to see him?”

The man answered, “He’s done nothing to insult me. I will see him when he is removed from office.”

No great man wants a neighbor dropping by
 to interrupt his work for talk and tea,
 but once he’s been removed from his high seat,
 he will seek out old friends to share his grief.

Story 32

I was tired of my life in Damascus, tired of my friends, and so I went into the desert outside of Jerusalem, hoping to spend time alone with the animals, but the Franks captured me and put me to

work in a chain gang of infidels⁷⁴ digging fortifications in Tarapolis.⁷⁵ A chief of Aleppo, who recognized me from previous dealings we'd had together, asked, "How did your life come to this?"

In response, I recited these lines:

I fled to the desert to free myself
of any presence that was not God's, but now
here, I am stabled with these animals,
and I must find a way to call them human.
Better a life spent shackled to friends
than a day with strangers in the most beautiful garden.

The chief took pity on me and bought my freedom from the Franks for ten dinars. Then he took me to Aleppo, where he married me to his daughter. The dowry was one hundred dinars.

Our marriage was still very new when my wife revealed herself to be extremely foul-tempered and disobedient. When we fought, which was often, she insulted me in the most humiliating ways. My life was most bitter.

A good man with a bad wife suffers hell
in this world, not the next. Pity those
married to evil spouses! Pity them,
O Lord, and spare them from the fire's tongue.

Once, for no reason other than to remind me how I came to be her husband, she asked, "Aren't you the man my father bought for ten dinars from the Franks?"

"Yes," I answered, "my freedom cost him ten, and then he sold me to you for a hundred."

A great man rescued a sheep from the jaws
of a wolf. That night, stroking the sheep's throat
with his knife, the man heard the sheep's soul speak:
"I thought you'd saved me from the wolf's claws,
but now I see you are a wolf yourself."

Story 33

“How do you spend your time?” the king wanted to know.

“I pray all night,” the man answered. “In the morning, I ask God for what I need, and the rest of the day I try to figure out how to feed my children with the little money I have.”

The king was moved by the man’s piety and ordered him to be paid a sufficient allowance so he would no longer have to worry about providing for his family.

You who choose to have a family
will never unlock the chains of this world.
Buying food and clothing for your children
binds your soul, estranges you from God.
I spend each day promising myself
to spend the night in prayer and contemplation,
but once night comes my prayers give way to worry.
What will I feed my children tomorrow?

Story 34

A man claiming to be a darvish in the Syrian desert did in fact devote himself for years to nothing but prayer and contemplation, surviving all the while by eating the leaves of the trees growing in a nearby oasis. A padshah on his way to Mecca passed by where the darvish lived. On his return, the king approached the darvish and said, “With your permission, I’d like you to come live in one of my houses in the city. You will be more comfortable there, and you will have more time for your prayers and devotions. The people of my city will benefit as well. They can come to you for spiritual advice, and you can be for them a role model of righteousness.”

At first, the darvish refused, but the king’s ministers urged him to reconsider and, out of respect for the monarch, to spend just a few days in the house the king had spoken of. If it turned out that associating with the strangers he met there was a distraction he could not live with, he could return to the desert without fear of recrimination.

The darvish accepted the ministers' offer and soon found himself in one of the king's private homes surrounded by a beautiful and lush garden.

Roses red with the blush of a beauty's cheeks,
hyacinths hanging like a beloved's curls—
all sheltered against the coming winter's storms,
like infants who hadn't yet begun to nurse,
beneath the pomegranate laden branches,
fire born of summer's emerald green.

As soon as the darvish was settled in his new home, the king sent him a beautiful slave girl.

As if a crescent moon had come to walk
the earth, her every movement tempted him;
an angel's grace, a peacock's majesty,
how could he not want to possess her beauty?

Then the king sent a slave boy, similarly beautiful, and elegant, and serene.

People around him are dying of thirst,
but he, as if he doesn't know he wears
a saki's⁷⁶ face, pretends he has no drink
to offer. They stare at him as if their eyes
were lips the sight of him could wet. It wets them.
They open wider, wanting more. More comes.
Then more. And even more. But nothing changes.
The boy's beauty taunts them. They stand there,
parched.

The hermit was seduced. He began to wear beautiful and expensive clothes, to enjoy the delicacies of the royal kitchen, the scented sweets, the ripe and luscious fruits, but most of all he spent his days enraptured by the beauty of his servants. As the wise have said, "The locks of a beautiful woman's hair are chains around the ankles of the wise, a snare to trap even the cleverest of birds."

My love, my faith, my learning, I've placed each one
here at your feet. I am that bird. You've captured me.

And so the darvish left behind the simplicity and spiritual contentment of his life in the desert. As they say:

Faqih, preacher, pir, murid—each one⁷⁷
devotes himself to a pure-minded life,
but let him step too far into *this* world,
and like a fly in honey, he'll be stuck.

The king went to visit the darvish and was pleasantly surprised at how much his guest had changed. When the sovereign entered the house, he saw a man whose cheeks were flushed with pleasure, whose skin had become white now that it was properly shielded from the sun and whose belly had grown large from the gourmet food he'd been eating. He was, the darvish, reclining on a couch of gold brocade, luxuriating beneath the peacock-feather fans his two servants were waving on either side of him. The king told the darvish how happy he was to see him situated so comfortably in his new home, and then the two men talked for a long time about a wide variety of subjects, until the king, as he was leaving, said, "There are two types of people I fear more than any other: scholars and darvishes."

A politically shrewd and very wise vizier heard what the king said and replied, "Sire, if you would maintain the friendship of such men, prudence dictates that you do for each group that which is right for who they are. Give gold to a scholar so he can further his scholarship, but give nothing to a darvish so that he can remain a darvish."

A darvish needs neither dirhems nor dinars;
if he takes one from you, find another darvish.
A righteous man who holds God's secret
in his heart needs neither waqfbread⁷⁸
nor begged food to make him a darvish. He is one.
A woman whose figure ravishes your heart,
whose ears even are more gorgeous than words
can say, needs neither jewelry nor makeup

nor the finest turquoise rings to improve
her beauty. In fact, they detract from it.
When I have more than I need and still want more,
I have lost the right to the name *darvish*.

Story 35

A similar story is told of a padshah who promised that if a situation of which he had become aware resolved itself in his favor he would, as thanks, give money to the darvishes in his city. When circumstances fell out according to his wishes, the king kept his promise and gave a bag full of dirhems to one of his most trusted servants, instructing the man to distribute the coins among the darvishes.

The servant, they say, had a sharp mind, and so he spent the day wandering the streets, returning at nightfall with the bag still full of coins, which he kissed and placed at the monarch's feet, insisting he had found no darvishes to receive the royal gift.

"That's ridiculous!" the king said. "I know for a fact that at least four hundred make their homes in this city."

"But my lord," the servant responded, "a true darvish accepts no money, and so a darvish who does accept it is not a true darvish."

The king laughed and said to those assembled around him, "See, I wanted to do something good for those who devote their lives to God, but this arrogant man has prevented me from doing so. He must truly hate such people. And yet he speaks the truth."

A darvish who accepts your dirhems and dinars
is not a darvish. Find one who is.

Story 43

The acrobat had been deeply offended and was cursing his audience.

“What’s wrong with him?” a pious man asked someone standing nearby.

The bystander replied, “Someone insulted him.”

“What? This miserable wretch can lift a thousand man worth of stones, but he cannot manage to bear one word on his back?”

You have no claim to strength or manliness.
 Man or woman, your mind is weak; your soul
 worthless. If you can, sweeten the foul mouth
 of one who insults you. Bloody it instead,
 and you’ve proven only that your manhood is forfeit.
 A man strong enough to break in half
 an elephant’s skull with his own two hands,
 unless his manhood is equally strong,
 is not a man. God made men from the earth.
 To be a man is to be down-to-earth.⁷⁹

Story 49

They asked a wise man whether it was better to be liberal or brave. He replied, “One who is liberal does not need bravery.”

Go read the tomb of Bahram Gur:⁸⁰ “Better
 the liberal’s open hand than the closed fist
 at the end of an oppressor’s long arm.”⁷⁹
 We celebrate the name of Hatim Tai⁸¹
 these centuries after his death because
 his generosity remains unmatched.
 Pay the zekat⁸² from your own property;
 vines yield more grapes when pruned by their owner.

GHENA'AT

CONTENTMENT

Story 1

A Maghrabi⁸³ beggar walking through the bazaar in Aleppo cried out as he passed by the shopkeepers hanging the linens they wanted to sell that day: "O you men of wealth! If you were just, we'd be content, and no one would ever have to beg to make a living!"

Come, contentment, I beg you, make me rich.
If I have you, all other forms of wealth
lose their worth. Loqman devoted himself
to patience, for patience is wisdom's deepest root.

Story 2

An Egyptian emir had two sons. One devoted himself to wisdom and knowledge; the other, to accumulating wealth and power. The first son became the ullemma⁸⁴ of his generation. The other became Egypt's ruler. "I," the king pronounced, his voice filled with contempt, "have achieved the highest office in the land. You, as you were when you were younger, remain mired in poverty."

The faqih replied, "I give thanks each day to God that I have received the inheritance of prophets. You, on the other hand, must satisfy yourself with the legacies of Haman and of Pharaoh, whose kingdom you now rule."⁸⁵

I am the ant crushed daily underfoot,
not the wasp, whose sting we hope not to feel.
How will I ever give sufficient thanks
that I am blessed not to have your power?

Story 3

I've heard there was a darvish whose poverty was a fire consuming his soul. He'd sit patching his clothes in the street and comfort himself with these words:

Some dry bread and this patched robe are all I need.
My own troubles are lighter on my back
than a burden of thanks owed to others.

A passerby by asked him, "Why are you sitting here like this? Don't you know that there lives in this town a very generous man who has committed himself to serving people like you? If you go to him and explain your situation, he will consider it an obligation and a privilege to see you in better circumstances."

"Hush!" the darvish replied. "I'd rather die of starvation than beg someone to give me what I need.

"It's better to sit here patching these clothes
than to bow and ask a gentleman for robes.
To enter paradise with your neighbor's help
is to burn as if you'd gone to hell instead.

Story 4

A Persian king once sent a skilled physician to wait upon the prophet Mohammad. After several years of living among the Arabs, though, the doctor was disappointed. No one, not even one of the prophet's disciples, had come to him for treatment or advice. The doctor complained to Mohammad about this and Mohammad replied, "It is the custom here that people eat only when they are hungry and that they stop eating while some of their appetite still remains."

"This," the doctor said, "is the reason for their good health." And he bowed low and departed for home.

A wise man says he's hungry or reaches
for a plate of food only when his silence
might cause him harm or abstinence might kill him.
His wisdom is in knowing when to speak,
and his health is the fruit his eating bears.

Story 5

There was a man who often made vows of repentance but found he couldn't keep them. A sheikh said to him, "You must be the kind of man who eats a lot because you don't have the self-control not to eat when food is in front of you. Such an appetite is strong enough to break any chains with which you try to restrain it, but be careful, the day may come when it breaks you instead."

A man raised a wolf's pup to be his pet,
but when the pup was grown, it tore him up.

Story 6

We can read in the life of Ardeshir Babekan⁸⁶ that he once asked an Arab doctor how much he should eat each day.

"Equal to one hundred dirhems," was the doctor's reply.

"And how much strength," the king asked, "will this quantity of food give me?"

"It will," the doctor answered, "be enough to carry you. You will end up carrying however much more than that you eat."

We eat to live, and for the strength to pray.
Your question shows you think we live to eat.

Story 7

Two Khorasani darvishes were traveling together. One of them, because he fasted for two days at a time, was weak. The

other ate three meals a day and was correspondingly strong. They came to a town where they were arrested at the gates on suspicion of spying. Their captors threw them into separate cells, and sealed the doors with mud bricks. Two weeks later, the darvishes' innocence was proven, and when the doors of the cells were opened, the stronger man was discovered to have died, while the weaker of the two had survived.

The townspeople were surprised, but a wise man among them pointed out that the opposite circumstance would have been even more surprising. The one who'd eaten three meals a day died because he lacked the wherewithal to withstand the hunger his captivity forced upon him. The weaker darvish survived because his habit of fasting prepared him for that hunger.

A man whose appetite is very small
will not be overwhelmed by any hardship,
but a man who thinks that eating signifies
his wealth—if hardship overtakes him, he'll die.

Story 8

A philosopher told his son to eat as little as possible because overeating would make him sick. The son replied, "But father, it is hunger that kills us. Haven't you heard the saying, 'It's better to die with your belly full than to live hungry?'"

"Be moderate," the father responded. "Eat and drink, but not to excess."

Don't eat so much that the food fills you
from your belly to your mouth, or so little
that your soul rises from a body too weak
to hold it. We need food to maintain life,
but exceeding what we need destroys us.
Rose-water pastry when you're not hungry
will torture your belly, but the driest bread
after fasting tastes like rose-water pastry.

Story 9

They asked a sick man what his heart desired.
“That it not desire anything,” was his reply.

When your bowels are full and your belly's cramped,
even if all in the world is right, it isn't.

Story 17

I stopped and stood among a group of jewelers in Basra who were listening to a desert Arab tell stories about his travels. “Once,” he said, “I got lost in the desert. While trying to find my way, I consumed all the food and water I'd brought with me, and I assumed I was going to die there until I saw a bag lying in the sand. I will never forget the joy with which I opened it, thinking it might be filled with grain, or the bitterness and despair I felt when I discovered it was filled with pearls.”

A man walking the desert without water
will not distinguish if he fills his mouth
with pearls or shells, neither will quench his thirst;
and when the rest of his provisions are gone,
and he no longer has the strength to move,
it also will not matter if those pearls
or the pieces of a shattered jar adorn his robe.

Story 18

An Arab suffering in the desert from extreme thirst recited these lines:

I have one wish before I die: to stand
knee deep in the middle of a cool river
and use its current to fill my water-bag.

Another traveler, similarly lost, had some money in his pocket, but could not find a road leading to a town where he could replenish his supplies. He wandered until he had neither food nor strength. Some time after he died, a group of travelers came upon his corpse. Coins were scattered in front of it, and these lines were written on the ground:

Bestow upon a hungry man the world's
Jafaari⁸⁷ gold and he'll tell you that his pockets
might as well be empty as his stomach.
Give a poor man burning in the desert
boiled turnips; he'll thank you as if they were bullion.

Story 19

I was never one to complain about hard times, but once, when I couldn't buy shoes and had to walk barefoot, I went to the great mosque of Kufah to empty my heart before God. Before the first word of prayer left my mouth, however, I was confronted by the sight of a man with no feet, and my lack of shoes seemed suddenly a very small inconvenience. Immediately, I thanked God for the bounty of my life, reciting these lines:

In the eyes of a man who has eaten his fill,
a roast fowl on the table before him
conjures less desire than a fresh blade of grass,
but to a poor and powerless peasant,
even a burnt turnip is a king's feast.

Story 20

The midwinter night had fallen. Not too far away, the king saw a lamp shining in the window of a *dehqan's*⁸⁸ house. "We will warm ourselves there," he said, "and return to the hunting party in the morning." One of the royal advisors, however, insisted that it would be better for the group to make camp on the spot, chasing

the cold away with their own fire and sleeping in their own tents, than for his majesty to spend the night in the house of a mere peasant.

While the king was considering the vizier's words, the *dehqan*—who had overheard everything—approached the group bearing a tray of food. Bowing low to the ground, the peasant offered this meal to the sultan saying, “It is not that a *dehqan*'s hospitality would insult the sultan's dignity so deeply. It is rather that the royal advisors do not want the sultan's presence to raise the dignity of a *dehqan*, even for the briefest moment, to a level approaching their own.”

The king was so impressed by the *dehqan*'s wit that he rejected the vizier's advice on the spot. The next morning, as he was preparing to leave, the king gave the *dehqan* a royal robe as a gesture of thanks. The *dehqan* walked a few steps beside the monarch and, loudly enough so the king's entourage could hear, recited the following lines

The sultan's majesty remained intact
despite this *dehqan*'s meager offering;
but in the *dehqan*'s simple heart great joy
is rising, reaching for the morning sun,
the corner of your shadow at my door.

Story 22

“I have a warehouse in Turkistan and goods in Hindustan and look, here is the title-deed to an estate that I own, and I am in the middle of a business deal with this man—his name is written here—providing collateral, and then I'm going to Alexandria because the climate is good, or, no, maybe I'd better not go; the African sea is very rough. O Saadi, I have just one more journey to make and then I will settle down and for the rest of my life do nothing but enjoy the luxury of retirement.”

He was traveling with one hundred fifty camel-loads of goods, and he had with him forty slaves and servants. We were sitting in

his tent in the oasis of Kish, where he'd been babbling like that all night, but I couldn't help myself. "What journey?" I asked him.

"To China, where I've heard I can sell Persian brimstone for a high price. And then I will take Chinese porcelain to Rum and Rumi brocade to India and Indian steel to Aleppo and then glassware from Aleppo to Yemen and finally Yemeni striped cloth to Pares, where I will give up trading and open a small shop of my own."

At last, he was all talked out, and he turned to me, "Please, Saadi, tell me something of what you have seen and heard on your travels."

In response, I recited these lines:

"Perhaps you've heard this story: On the plain of Ghur,
a leader fell from his camel's back and said,
'Only these fill a wealthy man's narrow eyes:
his possessions and the earth that overflows his grave.'"

Story 28

A wrestler who was unable to earn enough money to satisfy his very large appetites complained about his bad luck to his father, asking as he did so for permission to travel. With his strength, he assumed he'd be able to make a living on the road. He recited these lines to make his case:

"These skills I've practiced to perfect will earn me
nothing if I pretend I do not have them.
Lignum aloes must be placed on a fire;
musk must be rubbed; or their fragrance lies dormant."

"My son," the father replied, "don't be silly. Stay here and learn to be happy with what you have. The wise have said, 'Happiness does not come to those who pursue it, and those who learn to want in moderation never feel deprived.'"

You cannot wrestle luck into your life.
It's like spreading vasmah⁸⁹ on a bald man's brow;
and even if for each hair on *your* head
you could claim two hundred accomplishments,
what good would they be if your luck turned bad?
Fortune's arm is stronger than your own.
In this contest, you do not stand a chance."

"But you gain so much when you travel," the son insisted. "You open yourself to new ideas, visit strange and wonderful places. You make new friends and reacquaint yourself with old ones. You can enjoy life in the city—and all of this enhances your standing in the world. Those who travel are more dignified; they are better judges of people; and they understand more fully the realities of life. As those who travel the Tariqat⁹⁰ have said:

If you never set foot outside your home
or stray from the path between your door and your shop,
you will never, raw one, become a man.
Go! Before death calls you, travel the world."

"That may be true," the father said, "but the infinite ways in which travel improves the traveler apply in fact only to five kinds of men, first among whom are the merchants. Wealthy and powerful, they own many beautiful and graceful slaves, male and female, and they have assistants as well, whose job is to make the merchant's life seem effortless. With this entourage, the merchant travels from town to town, spending a day here, a night there, and thus he enjoys the pleasures of the world, and every moment is for him pure diversion.

"A wealthy man is never a stranger. He
can pitch his tent on a rocky mountainside
or hot desert sands; it will not matter.
Alone or surrounded by friends, he'll sleep
on a soft bed and his sleep will be peaceful.
But a poor man, even though he has a name,
is nameless to his neighbors nonetheless.

“The second kind of man for whom the benefits of travel are meant is the scholar, who is welcomed everywhere and honored, for there is no one in the world who would choose not to hear him speak and be instructed by his eloquence and learning.

“A scholar’s presence is the purest gold,
a currency accepted everywhere;
while an ignorant nobleman’s nobility
is Shahrua, valued only in his own country.⁹¹

“Handsome men are the third group, because they are welcomed even by the pious who believe that a little beauty is worth more than great wealth. Indeed, an attractive face can soothe a broken heart and unlock even the most tightly locked doors. Simply put, beautiful people are made to feel they belong wherever they go.

“A beautiful man earns honor and respect
even if his parents chase him from their home.
I once found, pressed between the pages of
the Quran, a peacock’s feather. ‘This place,’ I said,
‘is higher than you should aspire to.’
‘Beauty,’ it answered, ‘finds welcome everywhere.’
If a boy’s good looks and graceful form combine
to empty your head when you look at him
of everything except the searing heat
of your desire, who cares if he’s been
disowned? He’s a pearl you must free from his shell,
He’s a pearl it would be unjust to leave in his shell,
a jewel each one of us would try to buy.

“Fourth are men who sing as sweetly as King David did, whose songs make even water stop to listen and for whose melodies the birds choose not to fly away. Such singers captivate the hearts of all who hear them, even the devout, who take great pleasure in their performance.

“I hear nothing but that beautiful song.
Whose fingers pluck it from the tahr’s soft strings?

Nothing is more pleasant than to listen
with good friends at breakfast to a gentle
and melancholy melody. A sweet
voice is better than a handsome face,
which pleases only the senses. The other
is a banquet for nourishing the soul.

“Finally, there is the artisan, who makes what he needs to earn
a living with his own hands and whose reputation does not suffer
as a result. As the wise have said:

“A tailor traveling far from his home
will always have a way to earn his bread,
but if the government should cease to rule,
the king of Nimruz himself would go hungry.”⁹²

“These qualities, my son, make life happy and travel fulfilling
for those who possess them. Others may go out into the world, but
they do so in vain. No one will ever hear of them and the stories of
their lives will fade into obscurity.

“If a man’s fate lies in his own destruction,
events will shape his days so that he meets it.
A pigeon destined not to see its nest again
will find a trail of seeds leading to the net.”

“But father,” the son was ready with an answer of his own,
“how in good conscience can I live my life in opposition to our
wise sages, who have taught us that while the amount of food on
our table might be determined by fate, it’s still up to us to gather it;
and while disaster too may be a matter of destiny, it is so only be-
cause we have had no choice but to open the gates through which
it enters our lives?”

“Suppose your table filled with daily meals
from nowhere—you would want to know the source;
and while the day of your death might be set,
still, you should not rush into a dragon’s jaws.

“I can’t stand this poverty any longer. I am strong enough to subdue an angry elephant or to wrestle the most ferocious lion. If it is my fate to meet either of them on the road, then so be it. I have to go.

“The man whose life is rubble around him
should not mourn what was, what could have been.
The world’s circle, wide open before him,
is now his. A wealthy traveler can buy,
each night of his travels, a place to sleep.
A darvish finds his bed where night finds him.”

With these words, he asked his father’s blessing and, leaving, said to himself:

“When a man of talent runs out of luck,
he finds a place where no one knows his name.”

He came to the banks of a raging sea the thrashing waves of which were so strong that their roar could be heard at least a far-sang away.

A deadly river—even water birds
were not safe!—the smallest wave of which
would send a millstone flying from its place.

He stood there watching the water knock the boulders on the shore against each other until he noticed a group of people waiting at the spot where the ferry would dock to take them to the far shore. Each person held the coin he or she would use to pay the fare, but the young man had no money, and so he began to praise those in the crowd as sweetly as he knew how, hoping to persuade them to pay his way onto the boat. They refused, but, seeing his size, they eyed him carefully and said:

“A man who has no cash need not fear violence.
A man with money has no need of force.”

But the captain of the boat laughed at him:

“You look like you’d fare well against ten men,
but you don’t have the fare; you can’t cross by force.
Come back when you have enough to pay your way.”⁹³”

With these words, the captain gave the order and the boat began to move away. The young man called out, “Will you take my robe as payment instead of cash?” The captain was greedy, and so he turned the vessel around and accepted the young man as a passenger.

Desire stitches a shrewd man’s eyes shut.
Greed blinds fish and fowl to the weave of the net.

As soon as he was close enough to grab the captain’s beard, the young man threw him to the ground, doing the same to another crew member who tried to come to the captain’s aid. When they saw how strong the young man really was, the passengers decided it was best to calm him by giving him the money he needed to pay for the trip.

A gentleman who witnesses a fight
will not allow himself to be provoked.
Kindness is always the best response:
A sharp sword can’t cut soft silk.
Speak softly, sweetly, use a gentle touch,
and you can steer an elephant with a hair.

As the boat set sail again, the passengers fell over themselves to fawn on the young man, begging his forgiveness, kissing his forehead and eyes. When they reached a pillar that had been made by the Greeks, the captain said, “If we’re not careful, we’re going to crash. I need a strong man to climb with this cable to the top so that we can avoid an accident.”

The young man knew he was strong enough to do the job but, in his arrogance, forgot that this was the man he had just recently beaten up, and so he forgot as well what the sages have taught us, “Even if you do a hundred kindnesses to a man you have offended just once, don’t assume he will have given up his desire for re-

venge; the head of a spear can be pulled from a wound, but the wound itself will never be forgotten.”

“You have,” Yaktash said to Khiltash, “injured your opponent. Don’t think you are safe.”⁹⁴
 You can be sure if you have hurt someone
 that he’ll make sure you suffer hurt as well.
 Don’t throw stones at a well-defended fort
 or stones may fall from the rampart onto you.

The young man took the end of the rope from the captain and climbed to the top of the pillar. Then the captain yanked the roped away and pushed the boat off, stranding the young man in the middle of the ocean. He stayed on top of that pillar for two days, without sleep or food, and then, finally, on the third day, sleep came, grabbing him by the collar and throwing him down into the water. The waves tossed him about for a night and a day until, barely alive, he was cast up on the shore, where all he could find to nourish himself were leaves and grass. When he had regained some of his strength, he walked into the desert until, tormented by thirst, he came upon a group of people paying one pashizi⁹⁵ each for a drink of water. He had no money and so he tried to beg a coin from them, hoping they’d be moved by his destitute condition. They were not. So he began to insult them, which also failed to persuade them. Finally, he began to fight with them, knocking several men to the ground, but the others overpowered him and left him beaten and wounded in the sand.

Despite an elephant’s courage and strength,
 it will give way before a swarm of gnats,
 and when ants swarm, acting with one purpose,
 they can flay the skin from a fierce lion.

When the group left the well, the young man had no choice but to trail behind at the rear of the caravan, which set up camp that evening in an area where thieves often attacked. Seeing an opportunity to ingratiate himself, the young man tried to reassure his companions, “You don’t need to be afraid. I alone can fight off

fifty men, and with the help of the strong young men among you, I can defend this caravan against any attack.”

These words comforted the group and as thanks they gave the man food and water. His hunger, though, was a fire raging within him, and so hot was he with it that he could not think to eat and drink in moderation. He filled his belly too quickly and he fell asleep when he shouldn't have, because as soon as it was clear he was deep in slumber one of the older and wiser men in the group said, “Listen, I am more afraid of this new guard you've hired than I am of the thieves he's supposed to protect us from. Let me tell you a story I once heard: A man who had managed to accumulate some money was afraid to sleep alone in his house because was afraid the Luris⁹⁶ would rob him. To calm his fears, he invited a friend to stay in the house with him, telling the friend only that he wanted some company in the night. Well, after several nights, the friend discovered where the man had hidden his money, took it for himself and then left town when there was nothing left to spend. The next morning, people saw the man who'd been robbed sitting naked and weeping in the street. ‘What happened?’ they wanted to know. ‘Has a thief taken your money?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘by Allah, my friend took it from me.’”

I never felt safe sitting where snakes live
until I understood their way of life.
The enemy who appears to be your friend
bites more deeply than any other foe.

“This man,” the older man continued, “might be a spy sent by the thieves to find out what we have and how well we can defend ourselves. I suggest we leave him here and escape while we still can.” The group was persuaded and left quickly, careful not to awaken the threat they believed they were leaving behind.

The young man woke and, alone again, roamed around with the sun beating down on his shoulders, not really knowing where he was going, until the thirst burning in his throat reduced his will to live to ashes. He sat on the ground and with these words began to prepare himself to die:

“The yellow camels have gone, taking with them
those whose loyalty I thought I’d won.
Who will speak to me now? I am alone.
Strangers have only other strangers
to walk the road with, and only those men
who have not known exile are harsh to them.”

No sooner had the young man begun to speak, when a prince who’d wandered far a field from his hunting party passed by and stopped to listen. Seeing that beneath the misery the desert had inflicted upon him the young man looked respectable, the prince asked how he had fallen into such a miserable state. The young man’s story moved the prince to pity and he gave the young man a robe of honor and a large sum of money and sent one of his most trusted servants to accompany the young man until he reached his home town.

The young man’s father was happy to see him and gave thanks that his son had returned safely. That evening, the son told his father everything that had happened, from the moment he’d set foot on the boat to the way the people of the caravan had abandoned him in the desert. “But didn’t I tell you when you left,” the father said, “that it didn’t matter how courageous and strong you were? As long as you left here empty-handed, your mighty hands would bring you no more benefit than a lion’s broken paws.

“A wrestler with empty pockets knows this well:
One grain of gold outshines all his strength.”

“You can’t expect to find treasure without first overcoming the obstacles that keep you from it,” the son replied, “and you will never defeat your enemies if you’re not willing to risk your life. How can you harvest what you have not planted? I suffered some small trouble, it’s true, but look what comfort I will enjoy because of it. Look how much honey I’ve brought home because I was willing to risk being stung.”

You can’t be richer than your fate allows,
but no one recommends you shouldn’t try.

The diver who fears the crocodile's throat
will never gather the pearls he most desires.
The lowest millstone does not move and bears,
therefore, the greatest weight. What will the fierce
lion eat if it never leaves its den?
How will a fallen hawk nourish itself?
If the only place you hunt is in your home,
you'll catch nothing larger than a spider's prey.

"This time you were lucky," the father said, "and God was kind and sent the prince to where you were sitting just at the moment you'd given up all hope. You can't count on things happening like that all the time."

The hunter does not always catch his prey.
The day will come when the prey preys on him.

Once a king of Pares went with his most trusted courtiers to unwind at the Masalla of Shiraz.⁹⁷ Just for the fun of it, the king ordered one of the men to put his ring on the dome of Asad, promising to give the ring—which was of course extremely valuable—to the person who could shoot an arrow straight through its center.

Each one of the king's four hundred archers missed.

Not far off, though, on the roof of a nearby monastery, a boy was shooting arrows at random. The morning breeze caught one and lifted it through the center of the Shah's ring. As a reward the king gave the boy not only the ring, but also a robe and a great deal of money.

After receiving these gifts, the boy burned his bow and arrows. When the king asked him why, the boy answered, "So the light of this achievement will last forever."

A sage's careful plans will sometimes fail;
while sometimes a child's error *is* a bull's eye.

KHAMOOSHI

SILENCE

Story 1

I explained to my friend that I would rather be silent than speak, because while conversation scatters both good words and bad into the air around you, your enemies always manage to hear only the bad.

My friend replied, “Those who choose not to hear any good in anything make the greatest enemies.”

An evil man will not approach a good one
except to call him a wicked liar.
The mole squints up at the fountain of light
that lights the world; ugliness fills his eyes.
To men who hate, virtue is a grave sin.
Saadi is a rose; his enemies see a thorn.

Story 2

A merchant asked his son not to tell anyone about the thousand dinar loss that he, the father, had just suffered.

“You’ve told me to keep quiet about this, and I will,” the son replied, “but at least you owe me an explanation. How is it to our benefit to hide what has happened?”

“If our neighbors were to find out,” the father said, “their joy at our loss would double our misfortune.”

Do not let your enemies see you grieve.
If they do, they will rejoice behind your back.

Story 10

The poem failed to impress the leader of the gang of thieves in whose honor it had been written. So he ordered the poet who was reciting it to be stripped of his robe and sent out naked into the world.

As soon as the poet left the leader's tent, he was attacked from behind by a pack of dogs. He tried to pick up a stone to defend himself, but the stone was frozen to the ground. "You sons of whores!" the poet cried out. "You let your dogs run loose but tie down your stones!"

The thieves' leader heard these words from inside the tent and laughed. "O philosopher," he said, "what would you ask of me?"

"Give me my robe," was the poet's reply, "if you will make me a present of it.

"Let me leave in peace; I'll expect no gift.
A man hopes to receive the good he deserves.
From you, I hope for nothing. Just don't hurt me."

After hearing these words, the leader decided to have pity on the poet and gave him back his robe, as well as a sheepskin jacket and some money.

Story 11

An astrologer came home to find a stranger in his house. He did not ask who the stranger was or what he was doing there. Instead, the astrologer became angry and began to insult the man. In response, the stranger attacked the astrologer and the two men fought, throwing the entire household into turmoil. A pious man who witnessed the entire scene said:

How can you know the meaning of the stars
if you don't even know who is in your house?

Story 12

There was a preacher whose voice was so difficult to listen to that you would have thought he was singing “the crow of separation” when he preached.⁹⁸ For others, his voice called to mind this verse:

“Surely the most repulsive voice is the donkey’s.”⁹⁹

Still others recited this couplet when they heard him:

When the preacher Abu-l-Fares brays,
even the ruins of Persepolis quake.

The preacher himself, however, thought his voice was pleasing, and since he held a place of honor in the community, the people did not think it would be right to tell him otherwise.

Over time, a rivalry built up between this preacher and another one from the same region, who decided he would teach the first preacher a lesson. “I had a dream about you,” the second preacher said once when he came to visit. “May it end well.”

“What did you dream?”

“I dreamed that your voice had suddenly become pleasant and that the people were flocking to hear your sermons.”

The first preacher grew quiet at this and thoughtful. Then he said, “Your dream was a blessing because you have used it to teach me a lesson about myself. I had not realized that my voice was so difficult to hear. From now on, I will not preach except in a quieter and more subdued tone.”

When friends insist my bad qualities are good,
when they treat my faults as evidence of perfection,
comparing my thorns to jasmine and rose,
they are not my friends, and I ask, Where is
the enemy who will teach me my defects?
A man who never hears that he has faults
will live his life thinking those faults are virtues.

Story 13

An itinerant muezzin who would occasionally sing out the call to prayer at the mosque of Sinjar had a voice that made those who heard it want to stop up their ears permanently. The emir whose responsibility it was to oversee the mosque was a decent man who didn't want to hurt the muezzin's feelings, so he said, "I pay my regular muezzins five dinars a month. I will pay you ten if you will go sing someplace else."

The man agreed, took the money and left. A few weeks later, though, he returned to the emir and said, "My lord, the ten dinars you paid me to leave here was less than I was worth. Where I am now, they have offered me twenty if I will go. So far, though, I have refused."

The emir laughed. "Keep refusing! Soon they will be offering you fifty dinars."

Your screeching scrapes the hearts of those you call
to prayer like a pick-axe scraping mud from gravel.

Story 14

A man with a very unpleasant voice was reading the Quran when a devout passerby asked him what his monthly salary was.

"Nothing," the man replied.

"Then why are you reading?"

"I am reading for the sake of God."

"Then for God's sake, do not read!"

If you read the Quran with that crow's voice,
Islam's light will shine less brightly in the world.

ESHGH VA JAVANI

LOVE AND YOUTH

Story 12

Imagine, they asked an ullemma,¹⁰⁰ a man in a private room, with the doors closed, everyone else in the house asleep, his passion growing, his lust rising, because there in the room with him is a woman as beautiful as the moon, and the man knows he could have her. As the Arabs say, “The date is ripe and the guard is not watchful.” Would such a man be able to abstain and keep himself safe?

The ullemma answered, “Even if he avoids the danger of the beauty before him, he will never avoid the gossip people will spread about him.”

A man who wrestles his lust into submission
cannot control what people think of him.
Worry only about your own business.
Others will talk no matter what you do.

Story 13

A parrot was caged with a crow, whom he hated immediately. “You are hideous,” the parrot screeched, “and rude beyond belief. How can I bare to live in the same space as such odiousness?”

“O crow of separation,¹⁰¹ if only the distance
keeping east from west were between us.
To see you in the morning when I wake
will be to feel my day turned into night.
You deserve a companion as loathsome as yourself,
but where on this earth could such a one be found?”

The strange thing was that the crow felt a similar hatred for the parrot, crying out as he rubbed his claws together in sorrow: “How can this be my fate? To be caged with you when I should be strutting with the other crows on the garden wall?”

“To be in a cell with depraved and wicked men,
for a man of God, is imprisonment enough.

“What terrible sin have I committed that I am being punished now, in this life, and this cruelly, to be locked behind these bars with this conceited, uncongenial and unintelligent fool?”

“Your portrait painted on a wall would empty
the land around the wall as people fled
your hideous face. If your fate takes you
to paradise, the rest of us will choose hell.”

I have included this story to teach you that no matter how much a learned man may hate an ignorant one, he is himself hated equally in return.

A pious man sat silent in a crowd
known for its depravity. A boy
from Balkh¹⁰² fixed his beautiful eyes on him
and said, “Do not sit sour among us
if we offend you. Your presence bitters
this place for us as well. We’ve gathered ourselves
like a bouquet of roses and tulips,
but you are a withered branch that doesn’t belong,
an unfortunate wind of ice and snow
bringing winter to our full summer bloom.”

Story 14

A man with whom I had eaten salt,¹⁰³ who had been my traveling companion for many years and in whom my trust had known no limits, sacrificed our friendship for the sake of a scheme that brought him only a very small profit. Despite this betrayal, I con-

tinued to carry him in my heart, as I learned he did me when I happened to pass by a group for whom he was reciting some lines that I had written:

When my sweetheart smiles sweetly at the world
she rubs more salt into my bleeding wound.
What would I feel if the tips of her curls
brushed my palm like the sleeve of a rich man
filling a poor man's hands with his largesse?

Some mutual acquaintances were in the group listening to my former friend, and when they heard him recite my lines they began to speak not so much in praise of the poem, but of me. My friend was quick to add his praise to theirs, confessing as he did so that he regretted having betrayed me and expressing the desire to renew our friendship. He did not know I was there when he said this, and so I sent him these couplets to tell him that I too wanted us to be reconciled:

You who were cruel and heartless and without honor,
wasn't our friendship an oath between us?
I turned my back on the world to bind my heart
to yours, but then you turned on me. Just now
I heard you say you want to reconcile.
Come to me. I will love you more than before.

Story 15

The man's wife, who was very beautiful, finally died, but his mother-in-law, a decrepit old hag, remained in the house with him because could not repay the balance of his wife's dowry. She made his life very difficult, but he could see no way of getting rid of her. A group of his friends came to offer their condolences, and one of them asked him how he was dealing with his loss. The man replied, "It is less painful not to see my wife than it is to see her mother."

The rose has wilted. Still, the thorn remains.
The treasure's been plundered; the serpent left behind.¹⁰⁴

Better to fix your gaze on a spear-head
 than to lift your eyes to an enemy's face.
 Indeed, you should end a thousand friendships
 if it helps you not to face a single foe.

Story 19

When the Arab king heard how Majnun had been driven by his love for Laila to forsake everything and wander the desert as a man possessed, he ordered his servants to bring Majnun to him, and when this was accomplished and Majnun was standing before the king in his court, the king reproached him, asking what fault Majnun had discovered in the human soul that he had chosen instead to live like an animal. Majnun replied:

“My closest friends blame me for loving her,
 but if they saw her they would understand.
 And you, my love, ravisher of my heart,
 let your face shine once on those who scold me
 and they will miss the lemons in their hands,
 and slice their flesh, and bleed for your beauty.

Then they will know the truth and, like Potiphar's wife, I will be able to say, “This is the one you blamed me for.”¹⁰⁵

The king was intrigued and ordered Laila to be brought to him. His servants searched the encampments of several Arab families until they found her and brought her into the palace courtyard. The king looked at her for some time, examining her outward form very carefully, but no matter which angle he looked from, all he could see was an ugliness that became more and more despicable to him as he thought about how highly Majnun had praised her. The plainest handmaiden in his harem was more beautiful than the dark woman he saw before him.

Majnun could tell from the look on the king's face what he was thinking and said, “To perceive Laila's beauty and the mystery it reveals to those who can see it, you need to look through my eyes.”

If the leaves on the trees ringing this glade
had heard what I heard of the glade's story,
they would have lamented it with me. Dear friends,
say to this man who does not seem to care,
"Love has not yet wounded you, and so
you cannot know the agony that overflows
Majnun's heart." When you do, we'll share our tales.
Till then there is no point to talk of bees
with someone who has never felt their sting.
Until we live the same experience,
words will show you only its empty shell.

Z A' A F V A P I R I

WEAKNESS AND OLD AGE

Story 1

I was debating with a group of learned men in the cathedral mosque of Damascus when a boy ran in asking if any of us knew Persian. Everyone pointed at me, and so I asked the boy why he wanted to know. He explained that a one-hundred-fifty year old man was on his deathbed and saying something in Persian, which none of those gathered around him could understand. If I would come, the boy said, I could tell them if he was trying to make out his last will and testament. Of course I went, and when I got to the old man's bed, he said:

I wanted only to lay here and rest,
but now my chest grows tight, my breathing choked.
I was seated at the banquet of life
eating my fill, but now, alas, I'm told
I have no choice but to leave the table.

I translated this into Arabic for those who were present and they were astonished that the old man would regret dying after having lived so long a life. I asked him about this and he answered, "What do you want me to say?"

Haven't you witnessed a man's agony
when his teeth are being pulled from his mouth?
Consider how much more he will suffer
when his precious life is taken from his flesh.

I told him not to obsess over the images of death he was conjuring for himself because they were all illusions, and I reminded him of what the Greek philosophers have said about the unpredict-

ability of the body: how a seemingly healthy person could die for no apparent reason, and how someone who appeared to be fatally ill could, just as mysteriously, recover. "If you want," I said, "I will call a doctor to treat you."

The old man lifted his gaze into mine and, smiling, told me this:

"The doctor sees his enemy fallen ill
and celebrates, forgetting he's a doctor.
A wealthy man hangs paintings in his hall;
beneath him, the foundation is crumbling.
An old man, dying, calls out against his death;
his wife applies an ointment to soothe his pain.
When the body's humors no longer balance,
neither magic nor medicine will restore them."

Story 2

After they were married, the old man explained, he took his new, much younger bride to a room which he had filled with roses, where, he said, he hoped to win her heart. She was so beautiful, he could not take his eyes off her and knowing she was his filled his heart with joy. He did not sleep during those first long nights, devoting himself instead to entertaining her with jokes and stories. If he could make her laugh, he reasoned, her affection for him would grow and her shyness would disappear.

He promised himself he would be as patient as he needed to be, he told me, but one night he could not help himself and he let his frustration show. He told his wife that she should consider herself lucky to have as a companion a man as ripe as he was with wisdom, education and experience. He had known what it was like to be cold as well as warm; he had tried in his life good things and bad, and he understood well the responsibilities of marriage. He was, he told her, a kind, sweet-tongued man, and he was willing to do whatever it would take to prove that he loved her and to win her love in return.

"I will give all I am to earn your love,
and if you hurt me I will not hurt you back.
Perhaps you will accept, like a parrot,
only sugar from my hand; if so,
I'll use up my sweet life in feeding you.

"You have not been given in this marriage to a silly boy more interested in chasing his own desires into whatever bed they lead him to than he is in being a good husband.

"Young men are beautiful to look at
and fill you with the joy they bring to living,
but they are faithless as the nightingales
who sing each moment to a different rose.

"Old men, on the other hand, live stable lives, their wisdom and propriety much better sources of guidance than the impulsive foolishness of youth.

"Marry someone better than yourself,
then count yourself among the lucky few.
A man as young as you will disappoint you.

"I talked like this for a long time," the old man said, "and I thought I had succeeded, that her heart, which I'd been hunting, had become mine. She, however, sighed from some grief-filled place deep inside her and said, 'Nothing you have told me tonight outweighs in my heart the truth of the proverb I learned from the women of my tribe: *An arrow in a young woman's side is better than an old man in her bed.*'"

When she saw her husband holding in his hand something hanging like a fasting man's lower lip, she said, "He's bringing me a corpse. I can rouse a man who's sleeping. Nothing I can do will wake that dead thing. A woman who rises unsated from her man will seek to quarrel with him all day long.

If an old man cannot rise from his chair
with a stick, how will his own stick rise?

In the end, since it was clear there was no hope that these two could be happy together, they decided to divorce, and when the woman's uddat¹⁰⁶ was over, she was given in marriage to a violent and unhappy young man who had not yet done anything with his life. She suffered a great deal with him, for he was a tyrant at home and they were miserably poor. Nonetheless, she gave thanks, "Praise Allah! He rescued me from that miserable wretch and delivered me into this permanent blessing."

I will because you're beautiful ignore
the way you hurt me. I will live to please you,
and I will walk with you through the fires of hell
before I enter paradise with *him*.
The smell of onion from your gorgeous mouth
surpasses that of roses from his hands.
A fine face, a golden gown, perfume, lust—
all of these ornament a woman. On a man,
two testicles are ornament enough.

Story 3

Despite his advanced years and great wealth, the old man explained—I was a guest in his home in Diarbekr—the beautiful boy I had met my first night there was his only child, for whom the father had prayed fervently, going each night to the foot of a particular tree in the valley, where it was known among the local people that God listened to their prayers. Later, I overheard the boy whispering to his friend, "If only I knew where that tree was—I would go tonight and pray for my father to die."

The moral of the story? While a father celebrates his son's achievements, the son complains that his father is a senile old fool.

It's been years since you've seen your father's grave.
How can you expect your son to visit yours?

Story 4

I was in my youth proud and foolish and I remember once, after a day of hard traveling, I came to the foot of a hill too exhausted to go any further. I made camp and prepared to spend the night. A weak old man who had been following the same caravan as myself asked me why I did not keep going, since the foot of the hill was not a good place to sleep.

"I am so tired I can barely move my feet," I said. "How can I keep going?"

"Didn't anyone ever teach you," he answered, "that it is better to walk lightly, stopping every now and then to rest, than it is to rush and exhaust yourself, as you have done?"

If you want to reach your destination,
take my advice and learn patience.
Arab horses can race twice a day.
A camel's slow pace lasts long into the night.

Story 5

I once met in a group of friends a graceful young man who was always smiling and who always had sweet things to say. His heart had not yet been scarred by grief and his laughter wove its way through our conversation no matter what we were talking about. Some years after this meeting, I saw him again on the street and he told me he was married and that he had children. I could see, however, that the root of the joy he'd taken in life when I first saw him had been pulled up and that the roses I'd seen blossoming in his cheeks had withered. I asked him how he felt and how he was doing. He replied, "When my children were born, I left my own childishness behind."

The white shadow of old age has touched my hair
and chased away my youth. I will not try
to bring it back. Youth belongs to the young.

An old man cannot have a young man's laugh:
 a river's water flows one way only.
 Nor will a field of wheat at harvest time
 wave in the breeze like a young crop again.
 I mourn the enchantments of my younger days
 when, like a lion in his prime, my strength
 and skill earned me respect. Now, instead of meat,
 cheese fills my belly, and I am an old leopard.
 A feeble old woman dyed her hair black.
 I said to her, "Mother of ancient days,
 your new hair falls around your ears
 the way it did when you were beautiful,
 but your back is bent. *That* you can't straighten."

Story 7

The son of a wealthy but greedy old man became very ill. His friends suggested that under the circumstances he should either hire someone to recite the entire Quran for him or offer a sacrifice from his flock.¹⁰⁷ The young man thought about this for a while and then he said, "The flock is too far away. I'd rather bring someone to read the Quran."

A holy man who heard this story said, "He chose the Quran because it was on the tip of his tongue, but it's money that fills the bottom of his heart."

Bow your head low enough each time you pray
 and you can pretend not to see the beggars
 asking for money. For one dinar, he'd stay
 stuck like an ass, knee-deep in mud, but if
 all you want from him is Alhamdu,¹⁰⁸
 he'll recite it for you one hundred times.

Story 8

When they asked the old man why he didn't get married, he told them he wouldn't be happy with an old woman as a wife. They

pointed out, though, that since he was wealthy, there was no reason he couldn't find himself a young wife. He said, "If I am old and unwilling to have an old woman as my spouse, why would you think a young woman would be willing to have me as her husband?"

A man of seventy should not make love.
If he thinks he can, he's fooling himself.
At best he'll kiss his wife and fall asleep.
A woman wants performance in her bed,
and pleasure, and she won't trade that for gold.

TA'ALIM VA TARBIYAT

EDUCATION

Story 6

When the padshah brought his son to live in the teacher's house, he said, "Educate my son as if he were your own child." The prince lived with the teacher for a few years, but no matter what the teacher did, the prince learned nothing. The teacher's own sons, on the other hand, showed great progress in their studies, becoming more learned and eloquent each year. The king accused the teacher of giving more attention to his own children than to the prince, and he threatened to punish the teacher if things didn't change.

"But your majesty," the teacher replied, "I am giving them all the same instruction. I can't help it if their abilities are different."

Silver and gold are both mined from stone,
but not all stone contains silver and gold.
Canopus casts its light upon the whole world
but here gives sack-leather and there adam.¹⁰⁹

Story 7

I heard a pir say to his murid,¹¹⁰ "People are so preoccupied with their own survival that if they devoted as much energy to thinking about He Who gives us what we need to live, they would raise themselves even higher than the angels."

Yazed¹¹¹ did not forget when you were first
conceived in your mother's womb that you would need
a soul, and intellect, and speech, and five senses
if who you were was ever to emerge.
He put five fingers on each hand, an arm

on each shoulder... You who fear starvation
and homelessness, do you really think He'd fail
you now and leave you unprovided-for?

Story 8

I saw a desert Arab saying to his son, "On the day of resurrection you will not be asked about your family. Instead, God will want to know what good you did in the world."

The worm that made the silk we kiss
in the Kaba's covering is not why we kiss it.
That piece of cloth commands respect because
the weaver wove his own worth into it.

Story 12

One year, in a caravan bound for Mecca, there was tension among those who were walking. I was one of them. A fight broke out. We were punching each other and screaming at the top of our lungs, and I saw a man tending the camels turn to one of his friends and say, "Isn't this lovely? A pawn made of ivory can cross a chessboard to become a farzin.¹¹² These footmen of the Haj have made their way across the desert only to become like animals."

Say for me to the Haji who picks fights
with his companions, "You are not a Haji.
That camel, on the other hand, eating
thorns, bearing what others need it to, is."

Story 13

A sage scolded an Indian who was learning to throw naphtha,¹¹³ "This is not the kind of thing you should be doing if your home is made of reeds."

If speaking would not be proper, don't speak.
If asking will not promote good, don't ask.

Story 14

A small man whose eyes were hurting him went to a farrier¹¹⁴ for treatment. The farrier put in the man's eyes the same medicine he used to treat his four-legged patients, but the man became blind. He tried to sue the farrier, but the judge threw the case out of court, saying, "If this man had not been an ass to begin with, he would not have gone to a farrier."

The moral of the story: If you trust a man with no experience to do the work you need, don't complain about it later when he does a poor job. If you do, people will think of you as empty-headed and foolish.

Savvy people know better than to give
important work to a frivolous mind.
A mat maker might weave perfect mats,
but he shouldn't work in a silk factory.

Story 17

One year, I traveled with a group from Damascus on the road leading out of Balkh. Because the road was known to be extremely dangerous, we hired as an escort a young man whose expertise with a bow, and with all other weaponry as well, was unmatched, and whose strength surpassed that of ten men. He was, however, both inexperienced and spoiled. His family was very wealthy and his life had always been cushioned by the luxury their wealth provided. In other words, he'd never stood with warriors as the war drums sounded or been dazzled by a real sword in the hand of a real opponent.

No enemy had ever taken him captive;
nor had arrows fallen around him like rain.

I happened one day to be running beside him, watching him knock down each wall that stood in our way and pull up every big tree that he saw, and with each show of strength, he boasted:

Bring an elephant to the side of this road;
show him what a hero's shoulders can do.
Bring a lion; he too will be humbled.

As we ran, two Indians jumped out from behind a rock. One had a club, while the other held a sling at the ready. I cried out to the young man that he should protect us:

Now is your chance; here is your enemy
running towards you as towards his own grave.

But the young man stood trembling in fear, unable to move, his bow and arrow lying at his feet where he'd dropped them.

Just because a man can split a hair
with an armor-piercing arrow doesn't mean
he's prepared to risk his life in combat.

We had no choice. We left the thieves our bags, our weapons and our clothes, taking with us only our lives.

If you want a man to help you hunt a lion,
hire a man who has hunted lions before.
A youth may have the strength and skill to fight,
but fear will snap his joints before the first blow falls.
A seasoned warrior can see a battle's structure
before it starts, just like a judge can see
the law's logic before the lawyers speak.

Story 18

I overheard a rich man's son and a poor man's son arguing as they stood near the grave of the wealthier boy's father. "My father's coffin," the rich boy was saying, "has a marble gravestone deco-

rated with a mosaic of turquoise-like gems, and his epitaph has been carved in the most elegant script. Your father's grave, on the other hand, is nothing more than two bricks pushed together with two handfuls of mud thrown over them."

The poor son listened quietly. Then he said, "By the time your father gets out from under that heavy stone, mine will already be in paradise."

An ass walks lightly with a light burden.
Just so, a darvish who carries on his back
nothing but his own poverty will arrive
at death's gate at ease with the life he's lived
and with his fate; but a wealthy man, whose life
lacked nothing, will find it hard to die,
for death means leaving luxury behind.
In the end, the prisoner who escapes
with nothing will be happier than a prince
whose wealth lies just beyond the bars of his cage.

Story 19

I asked a wise man to explain the proverb, "Consider the passion between your thighs an enemy."

"Satisfy an enemy," he said, "and that enemy will become your friend, but satisfy a passion and, over time, it will become an enemy."

Eating just enough to stay alive
nurtures an angel's nature in us; eating
like the animals, till our full bellies
weigh us down, grounds us in this world, like stones.
Give a man what he wants and he will obey you;
give passion what it craves, it will make you its slave.

Story 20

A debate between Saadi and another man about the distribution of wealth and the character of the wealthy.

I passed in the street a man dressed like a darvish telling a group of people that darvishes lacked any power to do real good in the world because they depended on the willingness of the wealthy to be charitable, but since the wealthy were almost always unwilling, all a darvish had to help those in need were his own empty pockets.

The generous have no money to give.
Those with money have no generosity.

I took exception to these words. The wealthy have always been generous to me, and so I responded, “My good friend, the rich put money in the hands of the poor and food on the tables of those who can’t feed themselves; travelers and pilgrims find shelter in the homes of the wealthy, who also assume financial responsibility for their families, and for their servants as well. Without the charity given by those with money, widows and orphans, the elderly—all would go hungry.

“Look around you! The wealthy do not hoard their wealth: they tithe and offer gifts to God, and hospitality to those who need it. They free slaves and give charity freely; but you, distracted as you are by need, are barely able to pray. How can you hope to do in the world the good the rich have done?”

“Because the rich have money, they can afford to be generous; and because they live in comfort, because their clothes are clean and their reputations secure, they understand better than anyone why the obligation to give to the poor exists. What strength can an empty stomach give to one who wants to pray? If your pockets are empty, what do you have to be generous with? Face it, true devo-

tion requires a full belly, proper worship requires proper attire, and each requires money. If your feet are tied to the ground where you stand, you cannot walk. What good can you, with your grumbling belly, do?

“A man who doesn't know where he will eat
tomorrow will sleep through troubled dreams tonight.
The ant works all summer to store the food
he'll need to live through winter's cold in comfort.

“If you're poor, you can't be free of worry; your life will never be easy. The wealthy man steeped in his evening prayers and the poor man desperate for his evening meal, how can these two ways of living ever be reconciled?

“A wealthy man can concentrate on God.
A man who's hungry feels only his hunger.

“The wealthy are more comfortable and so their minds are more focused when they pray. Their prayers, therefore, are more likely to find favor with God. The Arabs say, ‘Allah is my refuge from poverty and from unpleasant neighbors.’ And there is another saying, ‘Poverty is a black stain in this world and the next.’”

“But,” the man interrupted, “the Prophet also says, ‘Poverty is my glory.’”

“Quiet!” I glared at him. “Don't dare misuse the Prophet's words like that! Mohammad was referring to the poverty of those who have fought hard to accept that they are poor and who therefore submit to their fate with full knowledge. He was not talking about those who put on the darvish's robes and then sell the charitable portions of food they receive.

“You whose thunderous speech is empty bluster,
if you have nothing when your struggle comes,
how will you struggle? You say you are a man.
Then give up the thousand prayer-beads-on-a-string
you've used till now to prove your righteousness.
Show what you're made of: purge yourself of greed.

“In the absence of divine knowledge, poverty will drive a dar-vish to apostasy. As they say, ‘Poverty is almost infidelity.’ The naked, the imprisoned, their loyalty is for sale to those who clothe or free them, and they can be neither clothed nor freed without money. You may ask if we who are poor can ever achieve what the wealthy achieve, if our hands that receive what they give will ever resemble their hands, so that we may give in our turn. Do you not know that when God speaks of the pleasures of paradise—‘...the chosen creatures of God, whose provision is predetermined’¹¹⁵—He means that those who are not chosen, who have not deserved that ‘predetermined provision’ will be poor in the next world? And that they will be poor there because they were greedy here? In Paradise, all who have worked for it, whether they were wealthy in this world or not, will have enough.

“The thirsty search for water in their dreams
and dream the world’s a spring to quench their thirst.
A clod of earth fell on a poor dog’s head;
he barked for joy, thinking it was a bone.
Imagine two men carrying a corpse
on their shoulders. A greedy man will see
a long table laden with food for him.

“God favors the wealthy, it’s true. He treasures them when they observe His laws, and He shelters them from the consequences of their sins. But think about this—and I know I have not yet offered evidence to make this point, but use your common sense and tell me if I’m not right—have you ever seen a beggar with his hands tied to his shoulders, or a man sitting in prison, or an innocent violated, or a hand amputated where the cause could not be traced back to poverty? People who have been poor for too long no longer fear God’s punishment. They no longer distinguish between what is permitted and what is not, and so they do things that would make you or me tremble with fear, and they face the consequences without complaining. Men of great courage have been compelled by need to dig tunnels underneath the houses they intend to rob, and when they are caught they are hobbled for their crime. And since we know that the stomach and the genitals are

twins—that they are, in other words, born of the same belly: if you satisfy one, the other too will be content—since we know this, we know it is possible even for a darvish, if his hunger is deep enough, to surrender to lust and commit the sins lust leads us into. I have heard in fact of one such darvish who was caught having sex with a boy. He was, of course, deeply ashamed, but he was also in danger of being stoned, and so he said in his own defense, ‘Fellow Muslims, I have no money to marry a woman and I am tired of self-restraint. What else could I do? *There is no celibacy in Islam.*’¹¹⁶

“Indeed, one reason wealthy men are so at peace is that they take each night a beautiful woman in their arms and have before them each day a boy who shines in their eyes more brightly than the morning sun, whose beauty puts the cypresses to shame.

“Why would a man whose struggle with himself
succeeds, earning him a Houri’s charms,
glance at an earthly beauty even once?
A man served fresh dates whenever he wants
has no need to knock new ones from the tree.
But a starving dog standing guard at roadside
over a carcass he’s about to eat
won’t ask if it’s Saleh’s camel or Dujjal’s ass.¹¹⁷
Hunger eats away at abstinence.
Poverty destroys piety’s conscience.”

When I finished speaking, the words shot from my opponent’s mouth with the rhythm and force of a horse in full gallop across a field. “You speak so highly of the wealthy, it’s as if you think they are the antidote to poverty rather than its cause. The fact is, however, that they care as a group about one thing only: how to increase the wealth they already have. Indeed, so hungry are they for the dignity wealth bestows, that when they do deign to speak to poor people, every word they utter is filled with contempt. To put it simply, the wealthy believe that being wealthy makes them better than everyone else. To them, scholars are beggars, and the wisdom of our sages—that the outward power of a rich but ungodly man serves only to mask his true but hidden impoverishment—is nothing but empty words.

“A wealthy man who dares because he’s rich
to condescend to a sage is an ass’ ass,
even if he looks like a perfumed ox.”

“You should not insult the wealthy like that,” I said. “They use their own money to make their generosity possible.”

“You’re wrong,” he replied. “They are slaves to their money. What good does it do anyone that they are like clouds heavy with rain that do not let a single drop fall or that they shine like the sun, but give light to no one? Their money is like a horse beneath them, but they refuse to ride it; they will not for God’s sake take a single step or spend a lonely dirhem without expecting something in return, or insulting those on whom they have spent it. They work hard for what they own, it’s true; but they also work hard to keep it to themselves, resisting to their last breath letting any of it go. As the wise have said, ‘A greedy man’s silver will come out of the ground only after he’s been lowered into it.’”

“You may work hard to gather the wealth you want,
but he who takes it from you will do so with ease.”

“The only reason you think wealthy men are stingy,” I replied, “is that you’ve been a beggar at their doors. Had you truly given up your desire for worldly things, you would not distinguish this way between those who are unwilling to give and those who give willingly. A touchstone¹¹⁸ shows us what is and is not gold; just so, a beggar knows who is and who is not greedy.”

“I am,” he said, “speaking from experience. The wealthy make sure to choose rude and insolent men to guard their gates, instructing them to turn everyone away, no matter how pious and worthy and discrete the supplicant might be. ‘Nobody is here,’ the guards say, as they push people from the door and, indeed, the guards have, if unwittingly, spoken the truth.”

“If a man empties his head of all thought,
if he forgets the past and denies the present,
if he ignores the future, the gatekeeper,

turning beggars away, describes his master perfectly: 'No one is in the house.'"

I said I thought this behavior was reasonable because it gives the wealthy some respite from the long line of people who in all other places and at all other times ask them for favors, especially beggars, since everyone knows that a beggar would not be satisfied even if each grain of desert sand were transformed into a pearl.

"To a greedy eye, all the wealth in the world is a single drop of dew in an empty well.

"That is why Hatim Tai¹¹⁹ lived in the desert. Had he lived in a town or city, the beggars would have followed him everywhere, and he would have been helpless to stop them. They would have torn his clothing from his body, as it says in the *Tayibat*:

'Looking to me will give others hope,
as if the well I draw from were bottomless,
and so I make it hard for you to see me.
Beggars do not replenish what they take.'"

My opponent said, "But I pity those who have nothing to give."

"No," I replied, "you envy the wealthy their wealth."

And so our debate continued not unlike a game of chess. I stopped every pawn he played with a pawn of my own, and every time he put my king in check, I protected myself with my queen, until his strategy was played out and he had no more moves to make.

Be careful! Do not lower your defense
just because your opponent debates
with nothing but borrowed eloquence.
Fortify yourself with *marifet*.¹²⁰
A *suja*-speaking¹²¹ orator
may display at his gate
weapons to scare you off,
but his argument is an empty fortress.

When it became clear that I had defeated him, he began to behave like the boorish man he really was, threatening me the way Azer¹²² threatened Abraham when Abraham could not be convinced to worship Azer's idols: "Are you averse to my gods, O Abraham? If you do not desist, I shall have you stoned to death."¹²³ My opponent insulted me. I spoke harshly to him in return. He grabbed my collar; I pulled at his beard.

We fought each other until a crowd gathered,
and they pointed and laughed, and we were ashamed.

Finally, we decided to find a qazi to judge the merits of our arguments. The qazi listened closely and then withdrew into his office to consider what we each had said. When he came out, he addressed himself to me first: "You who praised the wealthy and said unkind things about the poor, you need to remember that every rose has a thorn and that you cannot drink without getting drunk, and that getting drunk results in the next morning's hang-over. All treasures are guarded by serpents, and to obtain pearls you must avoid the man-eating sharks they share the ocean with. Life is always followed by death, and after you die, you must confront the demon at the gates of paradise.

"If a man who seeks the Friend cannot be touched
by violence, then why is violence in the world?
Treasure, serpent; rose, thorn; grief, pleasure—
each needs the other to be complete.

"Surely you realize that a garden will contain both musk-willows and withered branches. Similarly, in any group of wealthy men, some will be grateful for what they have and therefore generous with it, while others will not. Among the poor, some will accept their fate; others will not.

"If every drop of morning dew became
a pearl, the bazaar would quickly fill with them
like cowrie shells around a donkey's neck.¹²⁴

“Those who draw closest to the divine presence are rich men with the character of darvishes and darvishes with the spiritual inclinations of rich men. A wealthy man becomes great by sympathizing with darvishes, while a darvish becomes great by not relying on the rich. ‘God is sufficient for him who places his trust in Him.’”¹²⁵

Then the qazi turned to my opponent: “And you who believe the rich to be nothing but wicked and addicted to pleasure, it is true that some of the wealthy are as you describe them, and sometimes they do keep what they have only for themselves. In a time of drought, for example, or of flooding, such people would put more trust in their own power than they would fear the power of God, and they would not give a second thought to the misery of darvishes, and they would say:

‘People die of hunger all the time.
All that matters is I have what I need.
I’ll survive the way a duck survives a storm.
Women riding safely in their howdah¹²⁶
don’t know their camel passed a dying man.
Small-minded men will save their own carpets
then ask, “Who cares if the rest of you die?”’

“So yes, there are rich people like the ones you describe, but there are also those who are more than generous, who live their lives to please God and earn His reward, and they through their wealth possess this world and through their generosity possess the next—just like the servants of his majesty, the padshah of the world, conqueror, ruler of nations, defender of Islam, heir to Solomon’s kingdom, Muzaffar-ud-dunia wa uddin Atabek Abu Bekr Ben Sa’d Ben Zanki, the most righteous of all living kings, may he always find refuge in divine grace and may Allah prolong his days.

“No father has ever shown his son
the generosity you have shown the world.
When God wanted to bestow His blessing
on humanity, He made you padshah.”

When the qazi finished speaking, my opponent and I had no choice but to accept the wisdom of what he had said, and so we reconciled, bowing low to the ground in apology and kissing each other's head as a sign of forgiveness, and we ended our meeting with these lines:

Don't complain that fate has made you poor,
O darvish. Die with such words on your lips
and you'll be poor in the next world as well;
and you who have acquired wealth and power,
you've earned the pleasures of your great success,
but be generous too: Only then
will you also find wealth in paradise.

ADAB'EH SOH'BAT

PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL CONDUCT

One

The point of accumulating wealth should be to make your life more comfortable, not to be wealthy for its own sake. When they asked a wise man who is and who is not fortunate in life, he answered, "The fortunate man enjoys his life while sowing the seeds of future pleasure; the unfortunate man dies without having taken pleasure in anything."

The no one who devotes himself to wealth
but never uses it to please himself
has done nothing. He does not deserve your prayers.

Moses, peace be upon him, gave this advice to Qarun:¹²⁷ "Be as good to others as Allah has been to you." Qarun refused to listen, and you know what became of him.

A wealthy man who does not use his wealth
for good and so takes with him no reward
when he leaves this world for the next will spend
that world's eternity in poverty.
If you want the money you gather here
to be the measure of your reward there,
be generous here, as God has been to you.

There is an Arab expression: "Give to others without expecting anything in return and you can be sure you will profit from your giving."

When the tree of generosity takes root,
it grows until its branches arc above
the clouds. If you want to taste its fruit, don't saw

through its trunk with greedy expectations.
Thank God that He has not excluded you,
that you've enjoyed His generosity.
The sultan owes you nothing for your service;
the debt is yours because he lets you serve.

Two

There were two men, each of whom found that the time he'd spent trying to achieve his goal had been wasted. The first man made himself rich but took no pleasure from his wealth. The second man became a scholar but never put his learning to practical use.

The knowledge you possess counts as nothing
and you brand yourself as less than ignorant
if what you know stays only in your head.
A beast of burden loaded down with books
will be neither learned nor a scholar.
And if his load should be two baskets of logs?
The wood, the pages, to him it's all the same.

Three

The purpose of learning is to strengthen your faith, not to make you wealthy.

Self-respect, knowledge, piety—each one
is easy to sell, and you will earn enough
to fill a granary, but once the grain's
been eaten, the storehouse might as well burn down.

Four

A learned man who does not practice moderation is like a torchbearer who guides others but does not guide himself.

A man who pushes learning to the side,
indulging his desires without restraint,
buys nothing with the gold he wastes each day
but the emptiness he'll take with him when he dies.

Five

Wise men adorn the fabric of the kingdom like jewels, just as virtuous men adorn the faith. Padshahs require advisors who are wise more than the wise require the status and authority of being a royal advisor.

In all the world's books, padshah, no advice
exists better than this, *if* you will heed it:
Trust no one with your business but the wise;
they will never take it for their own.

Six

Wealth requires trade; learning requires debate; a kingdom requires laws. Without the latter, the former will not survive.

Sometimes you can win a person's heart
with kind words and manly generosity.
Sometimes, though, you'll need to instill fear.
Then use your anger. Like a single dose
of colocynth,¹²⁸ it will be more effective
than a hundred jars of the world's finest sugar.

Seven

Show mercy to a wicked man and you deprive good men of justice. Fail to punish a tyrant and you have punished instead those he oppressed.

Let an evil man become your friend
and he will use your wealth to sin, and you
will own for your trouble a share of his guilt.

Eight

Trust neither a prince's friendship nor the sweetness in a child's voice. A prince will change his mind on a whim; a child's sweetness can turn sour overnight.

If you give your heart to a woman who shares her love
with each of a thousand men, be prepared:
She'll accept it only to take it from you.

Nine

Don't tell your friend every secret you possess. How can you be sure he will never become your enemy? Nor is it wise to hurt your enemy in every way that you can. He might one day become your friend.

Ten

If you have a secret you want no one else to know, keep it even from your most trusted friend. No one can keep your secrets better than you can.

They'll ask you what you're thinking. Be silent.
Leave what should remain unsaid unsaid

and stop the river's water at its source.
Once the banks are full, the current can't be stopped.

Eleven

A weak enemy who claims he wants to be your friend wants only to become a stronger enemy. If, as they say, even the friendship of friends is unreliable, imagine how little you can trust an enemy's flattery.

Twelve

The man who thinks he can safely ignore a weak enemy is like a man who is careless about fire.

Put a fire out while it's still small
or it will grow into flames that consume the world.
Don't let any enemy string his bow.
To a small arrow, a chink in your armor
is an entire flank left undefended.

Thirteen

When speaking separately to men who are enemies, choose your words wisely so you will not have embarrassed yourself if they should become friends.

Anger between men is like fire.
Insulting one to the other adds fuel
to the flame, but if the men become friends,
the go-between will be, between them, shamed.
Playing middleman is a fool's errand.
You'll find yourself consumed, like kindling.
Whisper what you have to tell your friends,
or your enemies, out for blood, will hear you.

Speak wisely when you stand before a wall.
Behind the wall, someone might be listening.

Fourteen

Make peace with your friend's enemies and you become his enemy as well.

A friend who befriends your enemy is not a friend.
A wise man will wash his hands of him.

Fifteen

If in a given situation you're not sure what to do, choose the course of action that cannot harm you.

Speak kindly to a man whose speech is kind.
Don't start a fight with a man who comes in peace.

Sixteen

As long as gold will buy a conflict's fair resolution, it is not right to resort to violence.

Don't even think to draw your sword
unless every other strategy has failed.

Seventeen

Don't feel sorry for your enemy when he is weak; when he becomes strong again, he will attack you nonetheless.

A weakened enemy is no excuse
to brag about your manliness. Know this:

every bone contains marrow;
every coat contains a man.

Eighteen

If you kill an evil man, you spare humanity the further evil he would have done, and you spare him God's further wrath.

To pardon a man's offense is commendable,
but not if it soothes an oppressor's wounds.
One who chooses not to kill a snake
ignores the danger in the snake's mouth.

Nineteen

Listen to your enemy's counsel, but don't accept it. In fact, it is best to do precisely the opposite of what he suggests.

Be wary of your enemy's advice,
or he will have you causing yourself pain.
If he tells you, "Turn right!" Be smart. Make a left.

Twenty

Disproportionate anger will estrange those you rule, while inappropriate kindness will undermine your authority. Be neither so harsh that your subjects find you intolerable nor so mild that they feel themselves your equal.

If treatment causes pain with no relief
or spares the patient suffering but fails
to cure the illness, the doctor needs to learn,
as rulers must do, if they want to rule wisely,
to temper kindness with severity.
A father advised his son, "Be kind, but not
so much that a wolf will feel he can attack."

Twenty One

The only prince who should be governing
is one governed completely by the Lord.

Twenty Two

A padshah is obliged to be moderate in his anger, expressing it towards his slaves only to the degree that it reassures his friends he is strong enough to rule. Remember, anger burns the one who is angry first. More to the point, if the flames are too hot, they might burn themselves out before they reach the one for whom they were intended.

Don't let violence inflate your pride
or imagine pride can lift you high above
the earth where you were born. I have no doubt
that hot and stubborn as you are, you'll claim
you come from fire, not earth, but listen well:
I asked a sage in Bilqan to cleanse me
of my ignorance. "Learn the soil's patience,"
he said, "or use it to bury all your learning."

Twenty Three

A sullen man who flees into the sky
to escape disaster, will not escape
his nature. He'll wait for tragedy up there.

Twenty Four

If you know that your enemy's army is not united behind him, you can relax; but if you know they stand strong together, be vigilant. You are in danger.

If your enemies start to fight among themselves,
take the time to sit with your friends and talk;
but if they stand behind a single purpose,
draw your bow and fortify your fortress.

Twenty Five

When all of your enemy's strategies have failed, he will come to you with an offer of friendship and do things for you that no enemy would ever be able to do.

Twenty Six

Use your enemy's hand to kill a snake that threatens you. If he succeeds, you have eliminated a deadly danger; if he fails, you have eliminated an enemy.

Twenty Seven

If you know something that will cause another person grief, keep it to yourself. Let someone else bear the bad news.

O nightingale, sing only "Spring is coming."
Let the owl call out winter's bad news.

Twenty Eight

Don't tell a padshah about someone else's betrayal unless you're sure the padshah is willing to listen. Otherwise, you will accomplish nothing but the first step of your own destruction.

Speak only when you know your words will work
as you intend them to. The gift of speech
lifts us closer to God-in-heaven. Don't
waste it on words that will ruin your life.

Twenty Nine

Whoever tries to give advice to a headstrong man is himself in need of some advice.

Thirty

Don't be fooled when your enemy tries to deceive you and don't allow a flatterer's words to swell your head. The first one has laid a trap to get from you what he can; the second has camouflaged the jaws of jealousy.

Thirty One

A fool pleased by flattery is like a bloated corpse. Each has been inflated by hot air.

Learn to recognize when praise is meant
to earn a favor for the one who's praising.
The day you fail to satisfy his whim
he'll publicize two hundred of your faults.

Thirty Two

An orator's performance must be critiqued. Otherwise, the strengths of his oratory will not be praised.

Neither the beauty of your speech,
nor the praise of an ignorant man,
nor even your own convictions
are reasons to be proud.

Thirty Three

Everyone thinks his own thinking is perfect and that his child is the most beautiful.

I watched a Muslim and a Jew debate
and shook with laughter at their childishness.
The Muslim swore, "If what I've done is wrong,
may God cause me to die a Jew." The Jew
swore as well, "If what I've said is false,
I swear by the holy Torah that I will die
a Muslim, like you." If tomorrow the earth
fell suddenly void of all wisdom
no one would admit that it was gone.

Thirty Four

Ten men can sit at a table and share a meal in peace, while two dogs will fight to the death over a piece of dead flesh.

A greedy man would still be hungry even if he owned the world, while a single loaf would satisfy a man content with who he is and what he has.

The sages say, "To be poor and satisfied is better than to be rich and not see the abundance of what you have."

Dry bread will fill a hunger-shrunken stomach,
but all the wealth the earth contains will fail

to fill a rich man's greedy eyes. Before
my father died, he gave me this advice:
"Lust is a fire. Do not fan its flames,
which are the flames of hell, for you will burn
more than you'll be able to bear. Only
patience throws water on lust's blaze. Learn it.

Thirty Five

Someone who fails to do good when he can will find himself in
trouble when he cannot.

An oppressor is the unluckiest of men.
When disaster strikes, no one will be his friend.

Thirty Six

Life in this world stretches between two voids, the one before
birth and the one after death, from each of which we are always
only a single breath away. Those who sell out, choosing this world
over the next, are asses. They bargain Joseph away, but what do
they buy?¹²⁹ "Did I not command you, O children of Adam, not to
worship Satan who is your acknowledged foe?"¹³⁰

You betrayed a friend to join an enemy,
who is still your foe, and now your friend is gone.

Thirty Seven

Satan cannot conquer the righteous, nor can the sultan con-
quer the poor.

Lend nothing to a man who has no faith
even if you can't imagine greater need.
One who chooses not to follow God's law
will also choose to ignore the debt he owes.

Thirty Eight

Nothing that's done or happens quickly will last.

I've heard it takes them forty days to make
a porcelain cup from eastern clay. In Baghdad,
they turn a hundred out each day.
You know from the price what they are really worth.
A hatchling knows enough to look for food.
A newborn child doesn't. Nonetheless,
the chick becomes nothing but a chicken.
The child becomes God's greatest creature.
Look, glass is everywhere, so we ignore it.
We covet rubies because they are rare.

Thirty Nine

Patience breeds success; acting too quickly breeds failure.

I saw in the desert with my own eyes
a slow man overtake a faster one.
A horse, galloping like the wind, fell back,
while a slow-paced camel continued on.

Forty

The best thing for an ignorant man is to be silent, and if he understands that, and practices it, he will no longer be ignorant.

If the learning you possess is less than perfect,
keep your tongue tucked safely in your mouth.
Empty words disgrace the one who speaks them,
like serving a walnut shell without a nut.
A fool was trying hard to teach his ass
to talk. A wise man watching him observed,
"Aren't you afraid of what they'll say
when they find out what you're doing? This beast

will never learn the trick of human speech.
Better you should learn its gift of silence.”
A man who does not think before he speaks
will almost always use words foolishly.
If you will not take the time a wise man takes
to speak wisely, practice an animal’s silence.

Forty One

A man who debates someone more learned than himself as a way of showing off his learning reveals only his own ignorance.

If a man more learned than yourself
makes a claim you know is incorrect,
respect his learning. Correct him privately.

Forty Two

A man who spends his time with wicked friends will not see, and therefore will not learn, what it means to be good.

If an angel takes a demon for a friend,
his life will fill with hypocrisy and fear.
A wolf will never choose to sew jackets.
The wicked teach nothing but wickedness.

Forty Three

Never reveal what you know about the secret faults of other men. Not only will you shame them; no one will ever trust you again.

Forty Four

A man who acquires learning but does not use it is like a man who owns an ox but does not plow his field. As a result, he sows no seed.

Forty Five

Just as an empty seed husk will never sprout, a body that has no heart will not engender obedience to God.

Just because a man knows how to argue in debate does not mean he will know how to bargain in the marketplace.

Too often women use the veil to hide
not beauty, but a grandmother's wrinkled face.

Forty Six

If every night were a night of Qadr, then *the* night of Qadr would have no qadr.¹³¹

If every stone were a ruby of Badakhshan,
then rubies and stones would sell for the same price.

Forty Seven

Not everyone possessing outer beauty has an inner beauty to match it. A person's character cannot be read on their skin.

A single day reveals a man's learning,
but not the truth of who he is within.
Don't be fooled. A person's wickedness
can keep itself concealed for many years.

Forty Eight

Challenge a stronger man than you are and you shed your own blood.

A man who thinks his greatness has no match
does not see straight. Butt heads with a ram,
and it's your own skull you've chosen to break.

Forty Nine

To pound on a lion's back with your fist or to grasp the sharp edge of a sword in your bare hand is to reveal the shallowness of your intellect.

Don't test your strength against a man run wild.
If you wrestle, keep your hands away from his.
He'll draw blood with his nails to break your hold.

Fifty

A weak man who picks a stronger opponent so he can boast about it does nothing more than help that opponent to destroy him.

You've spent your life relaxing in the shade.
What makes you think you're strong enough to fight
a champion? A soft-muscled man like you,
against a foe with hands as hard as iron,
throws his fists like snow upon a hot stone.

Fifty One

If you will not listen to advice, you can be sure that you will hear it when others find fault with you.

If your ears are blocked against advice,
be quiet when I blame you for that fact.

Fifty Two

Like mutts who bark when they see a sleek and well-trained hunting dog but do not dare attack, men who have accomplished nothing in their lives will slander from a safe distance anyone with whose accomplishments they are unable to compete.

A jealous man who's speechless to your face
will try to ruin you behind your back.

Fifty Three

If there were no hunger, no bird would take the bait in a hunter's trap. Indeed, the hunter wouldn't set the trap in the first place.

Fifty Four

Sages eat slowly; believers, until they are half full; hermits, only as much as they need to survive. Young men eat until the plates are taken from the tables, and old men eat until they begin to sweat. Qalanders,¹³² however, eat until their stomachs are so full they can barely breathe, and no food is left on the table for anybody else.

A slave to food who overstuffs himself
is sleepless twice: once from indigestion,
and then again when his hunger returns.

Fifty Five

To ask a woman's advice is to invite your own destruction; to be lenient with rebellious men is a crime.

Have mercy when a tiger bares his fangs
and you make yourself a despot to the sheep.

Fifty Six

If it's in your power to kill your enemy and you don't, you have made yourself his ally against you.

To stop with a stone in your hand and think
perhaps the snake that doesn't know you're there
should not be crushed proves only that you're a fool.

Others point out that once you've killed someone you cannot bring him back. As long as he's your captive, on the other hand, you always have the choice. More to the point, keeping him alive might reveal an advantage you otherwise would not have known.

It's easy to deprive a man of life,
but once he's gone, he's gone for good. That's why
a wise archer teaches himself patience.
The arrows he lets fly will not return.

Fifty Seven

A wise man should not expect respect from fools, nor should we be surprised if a fool defeats him in a debate. Stones can always be used to shatter jewels.

A nightingale imprisoned with a crow
will cease to sing; a virtuous man caught
by men of ill-repute will grow sullen
and angry. You can use a stone to break

a golden vase but that will not increase
the stone's value, nor will the gold fragments
ever be worth less than fragmented gold.

Fifty Eight

You shouldn't be surprised when a sage falls silent in the company of boorish and vile men. A harp's sweet song will always be drowned out by a drum's thunderous rhythm. Similarly, the scent of rotten garlic will always overpower the perfumed scent of ambergris.

A well-known ignoramus lifted his neck¹³³
because he thought he'd defeated a scholar.
He didn't know the honeyed songs of Hejaz
always pull back before the drums of war.

Fifty Nine

A jewel fallen into the mud loses none of its value, while dust, even if it rises into the sky, is never more than worthless dust.

Undeveloped talent in a person is a shame, while trying to develop the talentless is a waste of time.

Ashes are of noble birth, since they come from fire, but since they have no value of their own, they are no better than dust.

The price of sugar is determined not by the value of the cane, but by the sweetness with which it enhances our food.

The value of Canaan did not increase
when it became the birthplace of a prophet.
Your virtue matters, not your origin.
A rose blooms from thorns; Abraham, from Azer.¹³⁴

Sixty

We recognize musk by its scent, not because the man who sells it tells us it's musk.

Like a perfume bottle filled to the brim, a scholar is silent, letting the value of what he carries speak for itself.

An ignorant man is loud but empty, like a war drum.

A learned man among the ignorant—
a wise friend taught us this—
is like a gorgeous woman among the blind
or a Quran carried by the zandiq.¹³⁵

Sixty One

Don't, in a momentary fit of anger, insult a friend who has been with you for your whole life.

A stone becomes a ruby over time.
Be careful not to break it with a stone.

Sixty Two

Reason will surrender itself to lust the way a weak man surrenders himself in the hands of a cunning woman.

Allow a woman's voice to dominate your home
and you empty all pleasure from its rooms.

Sixty Three

To have a plan but lack the power to execute it is to defraud those for whom the plan was made. To have power but use it without a plan is to reveal yourself as an ignorant lunatic.

Judgment, discretion, prudence, reason—
possess them before you possess a realm.
A king who rules without these qualities
turn his power and wealth against himself.

Sixty Four

A generous man who eats and makes sure others eat as well is better than a religious man who fasts and gives nothing to others.

Sixty Five

A man who gives up his worldly desires so that other men will praise him has traded a proper lust for an improper one.

A believer who dedicates his solitude
to other than God, sits and stares, sits and stares,
into the dark mirror of his own emptiness.

Savings become wealth little by little; a flood gathers drop by drop—which is to say that a weak man should collect small stones so that when he has enough of them and the opportunity presents itself, he can annihilate his enemy.

A full granary is grain piled on grain,
little added one by one to little.
Drop by drop, water becomes a river.
River by river, an ocean is born.

Sixty Six

A scholar should not be shy about correcting the faults of an ignorant man because not to do so reduces the scholar's dignity and confirms the ignorant one in the value of his ignorance.

Kind words in a common man's ear
do nothing but increase his stubborn pride.

Sixty Seven

All people are responsible for their own transgressions, but the learned bear a greater responsibility than others because learning is a weapon against Satan. In war, when a man is taken prisoner while he still has his weapon on him, his shame is greater than those who were taken unarmed.

Better to be poor and ignorant
than learned and self-indulgent. The first
wanders into sin because he's blind.
The second sees precisely where he's going.

Sixty Eight

A man who does not share his bread with others will be forgotten when he's dead. A widow cares about grapes she can eat, not the man who owns them. During the famine in Egypt, Joseph never ate enough to be completely satisfied; he feared if he did, he might forget those who were going hungry.

A man who lives in comfort cannot know
how poverty and hunger make you suffer.
If he wants to truly sympathize,
he must go poor and hungry for a while.
You whose horse is swift, consider this:
the mule, heavy with its load of thorns,
is stuck in the mud. Don't ask your poor neighbor

for wood to make a fire. The smoke rising
from his chimney is the burning of his heart.

Sixty Nine

Don't ask a darvish suffering through a year of famine how he
feels unless you are prepared to provide him with food and other
things he needs.

If on the road you see an ass collapse
beneath a heavy load, have mercy. Don't
push his head with your foot into the mud
as you walk past. But if you stop to ask him
how he fell, grab his tail and pull him out.

Seventy

There are two impossibilities in life: to be more successful than
you are fated to be and to die before the time God has set for it.

Nothing you can do will change your fate.
The angel appointed to measure out the wind
doesn't care if a widow's lamp goes dark.

Seventy One

You who've asked for food, sit and you will eat. You for whom
death has asked, don't bother running. It will not save your life.

It doesn't matter if you work or not;
God on high will send the food you need.
And if it's not yet your time to die,
you could sleep beside a lion in his cage,
or put your head inside a tiger's mouth,
God would not let the beast devour you.

Seventy Two

You will never reach what has not been placed within your grasp, but what is within your grasp will always be there for you to take, no matter how unreachable it may seem at the moment.

Alexander¹³⁶ searched the dark and found
the water of immortality, and yet
despite his risk and great effort, God
wouldn't let him take a single sip.

Seventy Three

A wealthy man who is also immoral and licentious is a gilded clump of soil; a darvish in his poverty is a beauty smeared with mud. The darvish is the patched robe worn by Moses, while the libertine is Pharaoh's beard strung with jewels. Still, it is the poor and devout who meet adversity with optimism, while the rich must worry about losing their wealth even when they are prospering.

Men of wealth and dignity who fail
to offer help to those in need must learn
that dignity and wealth will not be theirs,
ever, in the world that follows this one.

Seventy Four

An envious man looks greedily on what God has given others, and he hates as mortal enemies those who have chosen to live pious lives.

I saw a crack-brained little man insult
a sage who asked, "Why does your rotten luck
mean that those with good luck don't deserve it?"
Be patient with a jealous man and don't
call evil down on him: His jealousy

has sunk its teeth deep into his neck,
and nothing you can say will pry it loose.

Seventy Five

A student without purpose is like a lover without money; a traveler without knowledge is a bird without wings. A scholar who does not use his learning is a tree without fruit, and a believer who doesn't understand himself is a house without a door.

The Quran was revealed not for people to recite, but to help them improve their character.

A devout but illiterate man is like one who travels on foot, while a scholar who is not devout is like a traveler asleep on his camel.

A sinner who prays for forgiveness is better than a religious man too proud to admit he has sinned.

A friendly military officer
is better than a cruel theologian.

Someone else called a scholar who keeps his knowledge only in his head, "A bee without honey."

Words for a bee that won't produce honey:
"If you won't do your job, then don't sting either."

Seventy Six

A man who lacks virility is a woman; a devout man filled with greed is a highway robber.

You who wear the white robes of manly virtue,
hiding in its folds the black-paged book
of your life, know this: The day will come
that you will reach your hand for what you want
and your sleeve will slide back, and the book will fall
to the ground, open at the page of truth.

Seventy Seven

Two kinds of people can escape neither regret nor remorse: A merchant whose ship has run aground and a boy sitting with qalanders.¹³⁷

Darvishes will take revenge in blood
if you give them nothing to ease their poverty.
So you must choose: Refuse them as your friends
or color what you own the blue of their robes.¹³⁸
If you want an elephant-keeper as your friend,
build your house with room for elephants.

Seventy Eight

The robe a sultan honors you with is precious, but your own robe, old and patched as it is, is even more so, and while the food prepared by a rich man's gourmet chef may be delicious, the stale crumbs at the bottom of your own sack taste even better.

The vegetables and vinegar you make yourself
are more fulfilling than a gift of bread and veal.

Seventy Nine

It is wrong, and it violates what our sages have taught us, to guess at the right medicine to take or to follow a caravan if you know nothing of the road it will travel. When they asked the Imam Murshid Muhammad Ghazali¹³⁹ how he had acquired his great learning, he said, "By not being ashamed to ask what I did not know."

A patient cannot hope for full recovery
if the doctor doesn't know him well enough.
If you're not sure, ask. That small effort
reveals the path to dignity and knowledge.

Eighty

You will, eventually, understand everything you see. Don't rush this process, though. It will diminish your dignity.

When Loqman saw David turn iron
to wax, he didn't ask how it was done.
He knew he'd understand it in its time.

Eighty One

In order to be a contributing member of society, you must manage both the affairs of your own household and your responsibilities in the house of God.

Use what you know about your audience
to shape the story you have to tell, *if*
you know he likes you. Sitting in Majnun's house,
a wise guest speaks only of Laila's love.¹⁴⁰

Eighty Two

Spending time with corrupt people may not corrupt you, but those who see you in such company will assume you've been corrupted. If you stop at a tavern to say your prayers, these people will think you are there to go drinking.

Choose an ignoramus as your friend
and you mask your true self with his ignorance.
I asked some scholars for advice. They said,
"Don't associate with ignorant men.
If you are learned, you will become an ass.
If not, you will become a greater fool."

Eighty Three

Camels are such meek and gentle animals that if a child were to lead one away from its camp, the animal would follow even as far as one hundred farsakhs¹⁴¹ without any resistance. However, if the child were inadvertently to lead the camel towards danger, the camel would resist, pulling its bridle from the child's hand and refusing to go any further—almost as if the beast understood it would be blamed for what happened next. An enemy will not become your friend just because you're nice to him. In fact, you will only increase his greed.

Be dust at the feet of a man who shows you kindness,
but dust in his eyes if he becomes your foe.
Don't waste kind words on an immoral man.
A soft file will not clean heavy rust.

Eighty Four

Those whose conversation has been interrupted by a man trying to show off his intelligence will know him instead by the depth of his ignorance.

A wise man doesn't answer questions
he hasn't been asked, even if he knows
he's the only one who can. If he does,
his wisdom won't survive the fact of his rudeness.

Eighty Five

I had a sore under my robe. A sheikh asked me every day *how* it was, but he never asked me *where* it was. I learned later that he wanted to protect my privacy. As the wise have said: "Consider your question carefully before you ask it, or the answer you receive might bring you grief."

Unless you're sure that what you have to say
fits the time and place you want to say it,
say nothing. Better a captive for truth
than one who buys his freedom with a lie.

Eighty Six

Dishonesty is like a deep cut from a sharp knife. The wound may heal, but the scar remains. Look how Joseph's brothers became known as liars. No one ever trusted them again. As it says in the Quran: "They showed him the shirt with false blood on it. (Their father) said: 'It is not so; you have made up the story.'"¹⁴²

Make truth your habit. People will forgive
a careless moment of dishonesty;
but if it's lying you are famous for,
no truth you speak will find believing ears.

Eighty Seven

People are the noblest creatures; dogs are the lowest; but thinking people agree that a grateful dog is better than an ungrateful person.

Chase a dog with stones a hundred times,
he'll still recall the food you gave him once;
help a selfish man throughout his life
and for something small, a pebble in his shoe,
he'll forget all you've done, and turn on you.

Eighty Eight

The man who panders to his passions will not accomplish anything, while the man who has not accomplished anything will never be a person of authority.

Have no mercy on the fat, lazy ox
that eats and sleeps so much it cannot move;
but if you want that ox's life, then make
your body a beast of burden and bear the weight
of the whims of those you condemn yourself to serve.

Eighty Nine

It is written in the Gospel, "Son of Adam, if I make you wealthy, you will turn from me to the care of your money; and if I make you poor, you will sit with a heavy heart and do nothing but bemoan your fate. Where then will you enjoy the sweetness of adoring me; when will you rush to serve me?"

If unmatched wealth engenders selfish pride,
if poverty wastes you so you can barely think,
if both good fortune and bad direct you
towards you, when will you turn to Me?

Ninety

God's will dethrones one man while it protects Jonah in the belly of the whale.

The man who spends his life adoring You
is a man whose time is filled with happiness.

Ninety One

When God draws His sword in anger, prophets and saints protect their necks; but if He looks on the world with blessings in His eyes, He makes the wicked virtuous.

If God receives us at the resurrection
with anger and recrimination, even
prophets may fail to find forgiveness. Ask,
therefore, to see the face of God's mercy
now, our only hope for absolution

Ninety Two

Whoever chooses not to live a godly life after hearing warnings about the wickedness in this world will suffer eternal punishment in the next. Allah, the most high, has said so: "But We shall make them taste the affliction of this world before the greater torment so that they may retract. Who is more wicked than he who is reminded of his Lord's revelations yet turns away from them[?]"¹⁴³

An admonition is at first kind words
reminding you of what you have to do,
but after that it's a chain around your ankles.
If those above you offer you advice
and you ignore it, they put you in shackles.

Ninety Three

Men who learn from the mistakes of those who preceded them do well in their lives and pass on wisdom that the following generation turns into proverbs to live by—like thieves who have learned to shorten their arms so that their hands cannot be cut off.

A bird that sees a snare close on its brother
will not take the bait the first bird took.

Watch and learn as others make mistakes
so others do not watch and learn from you.

Ninety Four

How can someone born deaf hear? How can someone lassoed
by happiness not be pulled along?

To those who call God friend, the darkest night
shines with the light of a hundred brilliant suns;
but they don't achieve this happiness through strength.
They accept it as a gift when God gives it.
To whom but You can I complain about You?
There is no other judge, and there is no hand
stronger than Yours. The ones You choose to guide
cannot be led astray, and those You choose
to let stray will find no one who can guide them.

Ninety Five

The earth receives water from heaven but gives to heaven only
dust. You can only pour from a vessel what the vessel already con-
tains.

You may be right not to like who I am,
but don't change who you are because of it.
If I am like the earth, you be the sun.

Ninety Six

A beggar whose life ends happily is better than a king who dies
in misery.

Grief you suffer before joy is better
than grief that follows years of happiness.

Ninety Seven

God sees your faults but conceals them. Your neighbor gossips about faults in you he's never seen.

If people knew about us what God knows,
no one would be safe from neighbors' gossip.

Ninety Eight

You get gold from a mine by digging for it in the earth, but to get gold from a miser you must dig it out of his soul.

Ask a miser why he hoards his gold.
He'll tell you he prefers to contemplate
spending's endless possibilities.
One day, though, his enemy will get his wish.
The miser will die. The gold will be unspent.

Ninety Nine

A man who has no compassion for those below him will be made to suffer by those above him.

Not everyone who's strong enough to break
a weak opponent's arm chooses to do so.
Do not fill a helpless life with pain,
or a stronger man will do the same to you.

One Hundred

When his ship is in trouble, a wise man jumps and swims to shore, but when he finds peaceful waters, he puts down anchor and stays there. In the first case, he keeps himself alive; in the second case, he takes delight in life's sweetness.

One Hundred One

The gambler needed three sixes but got three ones instead.

A horse prefers a meadow to a race,
but his bridle is in someone else's hands.

One Hundred Two

A darvish offered this prayer: The goodness of good men, Lord, is ample evidence of your mercy; they do not need more. The wickedness of the wicked, however, cries out for your compassion; bestow it there.

One Hundred Three

They say that Jamshid was the first king who paid attention to the details of the royal costume. When he was asked why he wore rings on his left hand instead of his right, since the right hand represents excellence, he replied, "Thus the right needs no further ornament."

Feridun's Chinese embroiderers
sewed this, at his command, into his tent:
"A wise man treats the wicked well;
the goodness in the good speaks for itself."

One Hundred Four

They asked a great man why he wore his seal-ring on his left hand and not on his right. He replied, "Those who are the most worthy of praise are always the most neglected."

He who is the source of joy and misery
gives us either righteousness or luck.

One Hundred Five

The only one who should carry a warning to a king is someone who is neither afraid of dying nor looking for reward.

Pour gold at a believer's feet or hold
an Indian saber sharp against his neck;
he neither hopes for one nor fears the other.
Monotheism is built on this strength.

One Hundred Six

The purpose of a king is to keep oppressors at bay; of the police, to catch and imprison murderers; and of the qazi, to sit in judgment over criminals. If, however, two enemies can agree on what is fair and just between them, they won't appear before a judge at all.

Once you know you've lost your case in court,
pay gracefully and without bitterness.
The tax collector will collect by force
a man's debt if he tries to live tax free.

One Hundred Seven

Sourness blunts the fangs of all men, except the qazi's, which are blunted by sweetness.

Offer a five-cucumber bribe. The qazi
will find you're owed ten melon fields.

One Hundred Eight

What can an old prostitute do but promise to be chaste? And a policeman fired for brutality, what can he do but promise not to be brutal again?

A young man who devotes his life
to contemplating the Divine
becomes a hero in God's eyes
because, unlike the older men
who do the same, he can rise
to satisfy his lust, but chooses
not to. His strength surpasses that
of the old man sitting beside him,
who wishes he could rise, but can't.

One Hundred Nine

They asked a sage, "Of all the beautiful trees that God created, only the cypress, which bears no fruit, is called 'free.' Why is that?"

The sage replied, "Every other tree bears fruit according to the seasons, which means it is sometimes beautiful and sometimes bare. The cypress, however, because it bears no fruit, is always fresh, and it is freshness we respond to when we call a living thing free."

Do not value too much what will not last:
The Khalifs of Baghdad will be long dead
and still the Tigris will flow. If possible,
choose the date tree's generosity.
If not, take the cypress as your model.

One Hundred Ten

Two men died and each died grieving. One had been wealthy,
but did not enjoy his wealth. The other had been learned, but did
not use what he knew.

Everyone works hard to publicize
a greedy scholar's single fault, but look
how quickly fine gifts of food and clothing
blind all to the giver's hundred flaws.

KHATEMEH

CONCLUSION

With God's help, I have finished the *Gulistan*, and by His grace, may His name be honored, I composed each verse myself, choosing not to follow the custom of borrowing lines of poetry from other writers.

Better to wear one's own ragged robe
than to borrow and old, luxurious coat.

Some people have criticized Saadi for the humor in his work, suggesting that men of wisdom ought not to wrack their brains for ways of making what they have to say more palatable. Yet it is precisely the wise who understand best the necessity of sweetening with laughter the often bitter taste of moral and practical instruction. Readers who don't pay attention will not benefit from what books like mine have to teach.

I've given advice its most effective form.
It's taken me a lifetime to learn how.
If these words fail to find a willing ear,
it is enough that I've said what I had to say.
And you who've read this book, ask God's mercy
for its author, and forgiveness for the man
who owns it; ask whatever you desire
for yourself, and for the scribe who reproduced
my text, beg from God, for each mistake
he made, a pardon. At the resurrection,
if I have my chance, I will say, "Dear Lord,
I am a sinner; You, a generous master.
Given the wrong I've done, I have no right
to ask, but still, I beg You, absolve me."

I lived to see this Gulistan's full bloom
because God didn't take my life from me.
I owe Him more than I can ever repay.

LIST OF SOURCES

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ENDNOTES

¹ Technically, this is not true. An English language version of Omar Ali-Shah's French translation of the text does exist—*The Rose Garden (Gulistan) of Saadi*, Tractus Books, 1997. Ali-Shah's stated purpose in that translation, however, is not literary per se, but rather to reveal the Sufi meanings he sees behind the text. I must confess, though, that I did not experience the English-language version of Ali-Shah's translation as any more revelatory of a Sufi mystical subtext than Edward Rehatsek's 1888 translation, which is the one I used as a trot.

² Davis' translations, as far as I can tell, do not exist in book form but were instead produced for *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. They are in Volume B, pages 1549-1565.

³ John D. Yohannan, *The Poet Sa'di: A Persian Humanist, Persian Studies Series; No. 11* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America; Bibliotheca Persica, 1987) 12-13.

⁴ John Arberry Arthur, *Kings and Beggars: The First Two Chapters of Sa'di's Gulistan* (London: Luzac & Co., 1945) 5.

⁵ A. J. Arberry, *Kings and Beggars: The First Two Chapters of Sa'di's Gulistan* (London: Luzac & Co., 1945) 29.

⁶ Quoted in Arberry Arthur, *Kings and Beggars: The First Two Chapters of Sa'di's Gulistan* 17-18.

⁷ Edward Rehatsek, *The Gulistan or Rose Garden of Sa'di* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1964) 57.

⁸ *Ibid.* 64.

⁹ It is also an important cultural process that takes place as any foreign-language speaking population—or even marginalized, dialect-speaking populations—are incorporated into the mainstream of a culture. It's why, for example, there are so many Yiddishisms in English, especially as it is spoken in New York.

¹⁰ I have chosen to give my chapters both transliterated Persian and English titles. When I use quotes from own work, I use my chapter titles; when I quote from other translations, I use the titles given in that translation.

¹¹ Arberry Arthur, *Kings and Beggars: The First Two Chapters of Sa'di's Gulistan* 37.

¹² Ibid. 84.

¹³ A similar point could be made about Shakespeare. At least one thread of contemporary scholarship on Shakespeare tends to be more concerned with how the idea of Shakespeare has functioned culturally than in the actual human being who is credited with producing the body of work we refer to when we ask, "Have you read Shakespeare?"

¹⁴ Yohannan, *The Poet Sa'di: A Persian Humanist* 1-2.

¹⁵ Ibid. 5-6.

¹⁶ These lines are inscribed in the lobby to the United Nations building in New York City.

¹⁷ Caesar Borgia (1476 - March 12, 1507), the illegitimate son of Pope Alexander VI, initially followed his father into a Church career but found Church rank insufficient to his ambitions. He therefore set out on a campaign of conquest through much of Italy. He appears to have been greatly admired by Niccolò Machiavelli, who used many of his exploits and tactics as examples in *The Prince*.

¹⁸ A Roman emperor known for his decadence and depravity.

¹⁹ Edward Granville Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, vol. 4 (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1928) 532.

²⁰ A laxative.

²¹ Arberry, *Kings and Beggars: The First Two Chapters of Sa'di's Gulistan* 29.

²² The Quran, from the latter half of Sura 34, verse 13. Here are verses 10-13 quoted in full:

10. We favoured David with excellence, (and commanded):
 "O Jibal and Tair, glorify the greatness of God with him."
 And We made iron pliable for him.
 11. "Make long coats of mail," (We said), "and fix their links, and do it right.
 I surely see whatsoever you do."
 12. We (subjugated) the wind to Solomon.
 Its morning's journey took one month,
 and the evening's one month.
 We made a spring of molten brass to flow for him;
 and many jinns laboured for him by the will of his Lord.
 Anyone of them who turned from Our command
 was made to taste the torment of blazing fire.
 13. They made for him whatever he wished,
 synagogues and statues, dishes large as water-troughs,
 and cauldrons firmly fixed (on ovens; and We said):
 "O House of David, act, and give thanks."
 But few among My creatures are thankful.

²³ The expression probably refers to the belief within Islam that with Mohammad, who is the last and most perfect prophet, the time of the prophets and of prophecy came to an end.

²⁴ *Akefan* might reasonably be translated into English as monk or hermit, but the Christian connotations of those words seemed to me inappropriate for a text rooted in Islam.

²⁵ The significance of this expression was explained to me this way: To say of someone in a desert culture that he or she is like a shadow is to suggest that he or she provides shade and protection from the harsh glare of the sun. Saadi uses the expression to indicate that the Shah acts as God's shadow, providing God's protection to the people he rules.

²⁶ The word in Persian is *Zangi* and was used to indicate someone from the country of Zanzibar, but was also used to indicate black Africans in general.

²⁷ The Syrian month Tammuz corresponds to the month of July. The expression means that the sun is glaringly hot.

²⁸ In other words, you will have nothing to eat when it's time to harvest.

²⁹ The image of a man going to sit in a corner is used throughout the *Gulistan* to signify withdrawal into a life devoted to God.

³⁰ A month in the Zoroastrian calendar.

³¹ A short flight of steps used as a platform by a preacher in a mosque.

³² The bulbul is a small bird that is usually compared to the nightingale.

³³ Arzank is the name of the workshop used by Mani, the founder of the Manichaean sect.

³⁴ According to Arberry, Loqman is a legendary figure of pre-Muslim Arabia, famous for his wisdom and proverbial sayings. He is mentioned in the Quran in Sura 31:12. As Arberry points out, Saadi's reference to Loqman is therefore an anachronism.

³⁵ Hejret means "absence, flight, exile," and is the word used to denote the Muslim calendar. The year 656 in the Muslim calendar corresponds to 1258 CE.

³⁶ To have a long tongue is to be a person who speaks rudely, especially to people who are of a higher station, or who have more power, than you and to whom you are therefore obligated to speak respectfully.

³⁷ The Quran, Sura 3, verse 134. Here are verses 130-135:

130. O you who believe, do not practice usury,
charging doubled and redoubled (interest);
but have fear of God:
you may well attain your goal.
131. Keep away from the Fire prepared for infidels;
132. Obey God and the Prophet,
that you may be treated with mercy.
133. And hasten for the pardon of your Lord,
and for Paradise extending
over the heavens and the earth, laid out for those
who take heed for themselves and fear God,
134. Who expend both in joy and tribulation,
who suppress their anger and pardon their fellowmen;

and God loves those who are upright and do good,
135. And those who, if they commit a shameful act
or some wrong against themselves, remember God
and seek forgiveness for their sins:
For who can forgive except God?

³⁸ Feridun is one of the hero kings of the *Shahnameh*, the Persian national epic.

³⁹ Nushirvan is a hero-king from the *Shahnameh*.

⁴⁰ The beautiful female companions promised to the faithful in the Muslim paradise.

⁴¹ John the Baptist.

⁴² Rehatsek's note: "Men of holiness, whose prayers are believed to meet with responses, not only enjoy great respect, but are also feared on account of the imprecations [curses] they may utter in anger; and when impudent they can scarcely be punished."

⁴³ According to Rehatsek, Hejaj Yusuf was an extremely oppressive governor.

⁴⁴ The literal translation, according to Rehatsek, would be "his soul had come to his lips," and it means he was at the point of death.

⁴⁵ The word, which translates into English as beloved, means literally, "tied to the liver."

⁴⁶ The bazaar-master who is responsible for making sure that merchants do not use false weights to cheat their customers.

⁴⁷ The allusion is to "the fountain of immortality" which is said to reside in darkness but which, if you can find it, will grant you eternal life.

⁴⁸ Qarun was a man of great wealth who was swallowed by the earth for refusing to pay tithes to his cousins. He appears to be the Muslim version of Korah. See Numbers, 16..

⁴⁹ A plant used to soothe sore eyes that makes a great deal of smoke when burned.

⁵⁰ To have one's "foot upon [heaven's] sphere" is to be extremely happy.

⁵¹ Rehatsek translates the last two lines: "And if the vezier feared God/Like the king he would be king." I have chosen to incorporate into my version G. M. Wickens' correction, which appears in footnotes 2 and 3 on page 105 of the Rehatsek version.

⁵² Alchemists dedicated their lives to finding the philosopher's stone and to find a way to turn base metals into gold, but they always failed.

⁵³ See note 46.

⁵⁴ According to Islam, the first house of worship built for mankind. It was originally built by Adam and later on reconstructed by Abraham and Ishmael. It is a cubed shaped structure based in the city of Mecca to which all Muslims turn to in their five daily prayers.

⁵⁵ An Arif is a Sufi who has attained the degree of marifet or divine knowledge.

⁵⁶ This was the name, according to Rehatsek, of a celebrated darvish who still, during Rehatsek's time, had followers among a sect of faqirs in India.

⁵⁷ The khergheh is the traditional dress of the darvish, which Rehatsek describes as "patched garb."

⁵⁸ The *taj*, or crown, and flag were worn by darvishes when they went begging.

⁵⁹ The *aftabeh* is a container used for washing; it is shaped like the watering can we use to water our plants.

⁶⁰ *Nah tarashideb*, literally an unshaven man, signifies a man who is rude and inappropriate in his behavior and his dress. *Majlis* means a formal gathering.

⁶¹ You are, in other words, going the wrong way, north, in this case, instead of south.

⁶² Muslim prayer beads very similar to the rosary. A patchwork robe is the darvish's traditional dress.

⁶³ Some darvishes, according to Rehatsek, wore a cap of leaves to signify their status.

⁶⁴ In other words, a true darvish could wear anything because nothing external could change his internal nature.

⁶⁵ According to Arberry, in Saadi's time, this place was one stage away from Mecca.

⁶⁶ The Qiblah is the direction Muslims are supposed to face when they pray..

⁶⁷ Arberry points out that this Sheikh was famous in Baghdad and died around the year 1200 C.E., which means Saadi could not have studied with him. Some people have tried to argue that Saadi is really referring to people who were alive during his lifetime.

⁶⁸ The literal meaning of the text is "he would stretch out his hand," an expression that refers to ecstatic dancing.

⁶⁹ The currency of the time.

⁷⁰ The *daf* is a drum, like a large tambourine.

⁷¹ Patched clothing identifies the beggar as a darvish.

⁷² A darvish's patience is more valuable to him than gold because the gold will tempt him to become worldly. This, according to Rehatsek, is also why a darvish is not supposed to thank those who give him money. The fact that he feels thankful implies an attachment to the money and what he can buy with it that he is not supposed to have.

⁷³ Minister of State

⁷⁴ Arberry calls them Jews, whom Saadi would certainly have included in the category “infidel,” but I have chosen to use the more general word because it is also possible that the group was not made up *only* of Jews.

⁷⁵ Arberry says this is Tripoli.

⁷⁶ The *saki* is a cupbearer, usually a beautiful young man. In Persian mystical poetry, the *saki* often represents the beloved, the spiritual teacher or even the face of God.

⁷⁷ A *faqih* is trained in sacred and civil law; a *pir* is a spiritual guide; a *murid* is a *pir*’s disciple.

⁷⁸ *Waqf* bread is bread given to poor people through religious institutions.

⁷⁹ In other words, humble. Rehatsek points out that Saadi plays on words here: *kbak* means earth and *khaki* means humble. I have used the English idiom down-to-earth even though it has connotations other than humble to try to approach the feeling of Saadi’s wordplay.

⁸⁰ Bahram Gur was a king of the Sasanian dynasty whose reign lasted from 420 to 439 CE.

⁸¹ Hatim Tai was pre-Islam Arab who’s name was synonymous even in Rehatsek’s time with generosity.

⁸² Islamic version of tithing, stipulated in the Quran, according to Rehatsek, as 2½% of one’s income.

⁸³ *Maghrabi* refers to Africa.

⁸⁴ A sage, in this case, the man recognized as the wisest of all sages.

⁸⁵ Rehatsek’s footnote identifies Haman as the vizier of Egypt. In the Hebrew Bible, however, Haman is a character in the Story of Esther, where he is a vizier of Persia.

⁸⁶ Ardeshir Babekan was the first king of the Sasanian dynasty, who ruled from 226 to 240 CE.

⁸⁷ According to Rehatsek, Jafaari gold was named either after Jafaar, who was an alchemist or Jafaar Barmeki, the famous vizier of Harun-ur-Rashid, who changed the method of coining money from one that used alloyed gold to one that used pure gold, and so coins of pure gold were named after him.

⁸⁸ Rehatsek: "*Dehqan* is composed of the Persian word *Deb* 'village', and the Mongolian *Qan* 'lord, master, owner', which became afterwards with the Persians *Khan*.... The expression [*dehqan*] designates a landholder in general but in the present instance a peasant."

⁸⁹ An indigo dye used for coloring the hair black.

⁹⁰ In the Sufi tradition, the *Tariqat* is the road to perfection.

⁹¹ Rehatsek: "Shahrúa is said to have been a tyrant who issued a debased currency in his country, calling it after his own name, but the coins were not accepted anywhere else; others assert that Shahrúa means leather money."

⁹² "Nimruz" means noon, half day; and the country of Seistan is called by this name because Solomon finding it to be full of water ordered the Jinns to fill it up with earth and they finished work at noon.

⁹³ Saadi plays here on the words *zar*, which means "gold," and *zar*, which means "strength, violence." I have tried to render a similar play on words here with the double use of the word "fare."

⁹⁴ Yaktash and Khiltash were well-known wrestlers.

⁹⁵ A very small, thin coin.

⁹⁶ The Luris are the people of Luristan, a territory between Kusistan and Kerman.

⁹⁷ A chapel near Shiraz.

⁹⁸ According to Rehatsek, the phrase “crow of separation” comes from an Arab proverb meaning, “More ill-boding than the crow of separation,” which refers to the way crows descend upon an abandoned encampment looking for scraps of food. Being in the presence of such crows is considered very bad luck. Rehatsek also notes, though, that given the way the phrase is used by Saadi it could be referring to a song that was supposed to imitate a crow’s croaking.

⁹⁹ The Quran, Sura 31, the second half of verse 19. The whole verse reads as follows:

“Be moderate in your bearing, and keep your voice low.
Surely the most repulsive voice is the donkey’s.

¹⁰⁰ See note 84.

¹⁰¹ See note 98.

¹⁰² In Afghanistan

¹⁰³ The expression is similar to what it means in English to say you have broken bread with someone and it connotes a bond of friendship and commitment.

¹⁰⁴ In stories from the East involving treasure, there is usually a guardian serpent who must be killed before the treasure can be taken.

¹⁰⁵ The reference here is to the Quran’s version of the story of how Potiphar’s wife attempted to seduce Joseph. Here is Sura 12, verses 28-32:

28. When the husband saw the shirt torn at the back,
he said: “Surely this is a woman’s ruse,
and the wiles of women are great.
29. Ignore this affair, O Joseph; and you, O woman,
ask forgiveness for your sin,
for you were surely errant.”
30. In the city the women gossiped:
“The minister’s wife longs after her page.
He has captured her heart.
We think she is in clear error.”
31. When she heard their slanderings,

she sent for them and prepared a banquet,
 and gave each of them a knife (for paring fruit),
 and called (to Joseph): "Come out before them."
 When they saw him, the women were so wonderstruck
 they cut their hands,
 and exclaimed: "O Lord preserve us!
 He is no mortal but an honourable angel."
 32. She said: "This is the one you blamed me for..."

¹⁰⁶ The time during which it is against Islamic law for a man to have intercourse with a woman because she is menstruating or divorced or mourning the death of her husband.

¹⁰⁷ Each of which would be a way of entreating God to make him better.

¹⁰⁸ Literally, "the praise," which is one of the names of the first Sura of the Quran.

¹⁰⁹ Rehatsek: "Adim is the name of the beautiful and tanned leather of Yemen..., where the hot season, when Canopus is brightest, is supposed to exert a beneficent influence upon the leather." (Rehatsek)

¹¹⁰ See note 77.

¹¹¹ One of the names of God.

¹¹² In European chess, this piece is the Queen.

¹¹³ A chemical used in pyrotechnic displays.

¹¹⁴ One who shoes horses and treats them medically.

¹¹⁵ Sura 37: 40-41. Here are verses 38-49:

38. You [who were wicked and did not worship God] will indeed taste a painful punishment,
 39. And be rewarded
 but only for what you had done.
 40. Except the chosen creatures of God,

41. Whose provision is predetermined—
 42. Fruits of every kind,
 and they will be honored
 43. In gardens of delight,
 44. (Sitting) on couches
 face to face,
 45. With cups from a flowing stream
 being passed around,
 46. Clear, delicious to drink,
 47. Neither dulling the senses
 nor intoxicating,
 48. And with them maidens
 of modest look and large lustrous eyes,
 49. Like sheltered eggs in a nest.

¹¹⁶ According to Rehatsek, this was a well-known, often quoted proverb.

¹¹⁷ Saleh is a prophet who is mentioned several times in the Quran; according to Rehatsek, tradition says Saleh produced the camel in question from a rock. Dujjal is the anti-Christ. Saleh's first mention in the Quran is at Sura 7:73-79. Here are the lines:

73. We sent to Thamud their brother Sale.
 "O you people," said he, "worship God,
 for you have no other god but He.
 Clear proof has come to you already from your Lord,
 and this she-camel of God is the token for you.
 Leave her free to graze upon God's earth,
 and do not molest her
 lest a grievous punishment should befall you.
 74. Remember, how you were made leaders
 after the people of 'Ad,
 and were settled on the land
 so that you could construct on the plains
 palaces, and carve dwellings out of mountains.
 So think of the favours of God, and do not act
 with corruption in the land."
 75. The chiefs among the people who were arrogant
 towards the weaker ones among them who believed,
 asked: "Do you really know that Saleh

has been sent by the Lord?"
 They said: "Indeed we believe in the message he has brought."
 76. Those who were arrogant answered:
 "We do not believe in what you believe."
 77. Then they hamstringed the she-camel and rebelled
 against the command of their Lord
 and said: "Bring, O Saleh, on us the affliction you promise,
 if you are one of the sent ones."
 78. Then they were seized by an earthquake,
 and lay overturned on the ground in their homes in the morning.
 79. Saleh turned away from them and said:
 "O my people, I conveyed to you
 the message of my Lord and warned you;
 but you do not like those who wish you well."

¹¹⁸ A piece of fine-grained dark schist or jasper used at one time for testing alloys of gold by observing the color of the mark the gold made on it.

¹¹⁹ A man known for his generosity.

¹²⁰ Divine knowledge.

¹²¹ *Suḥū* is a kind of prose, according to Rehatsek, used primarily in Arabic that is more concerned with poetic cadence than with meaning.

¹²² *Azer* is the name given in the Quran to Terah, the father of Abraham.

¹²³ Sura 19:46. Here are verses 41-50:

41. Commemorate Abraham in the Book:
 He was upright, a prophet.
 42. Remember, when he said to his father:
 "O my father, why do you worship that
 which can neither hear nor see nor even profit you the least?
 43. O my father, to me has come such knowledge
 as never came to you.
 So follow me that I may show you the right path.
 44. Why do you worship Satan, O father?
 Verily Satan was disobedient to Ar-Rahman.

45. O my father, I fear lest
a punishment from Ar-Rahman should befall you,
and you should become a friend of the Devil.”
46. He said: “Are you averse to my gods, O Abraham?
If you do not desist, I shall have you stoned to death.
So go away for a while from me.”
47. He answered: “Peace be on you. I will seek
forgiveness of my Lord for you.
He has been gracious to me.
48. I will leave you and those you invoke apart from God,
and pray to my Lord. Haply in praying to my Lord
I will not be derpived.”
49. Thus, when he left them and the (idols) they worshipped,
We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob,
and made each of them a prophet,
50. And bestowed on them some of Our blessings,
and gave them high renown.

¹²⁴ Cowrie shells were, in Rehatsek’s time, still used as money in some parts of India, but they were also hung around the necks of donkeys and other beasts of burden, and it is this practice to which Saadi is referring here.

¹²⁵ Sura 65:3. Here are verses 1-3:

1. O Prophet when you divorce women,
divorce them at their appointed period,
and calculate that period,
and fear God, your Lord.
Do not expel them from their houses,
nor should they go away themselves,
unless they are openly guilty of adultery.
These are the limits set by God.
Any one who exceeds the limits set by God
sins against his own self.
You never know that God may perchance lead
to a new situation after this.
2. When they have reached their appointed time,
then either keep them lawfully or let them go honourably;
but have two witnesses from among you,
and give truthful evidence for (being acceptable to) God.

This is to warn him who believes in God and the Last Day.
God will furnish a way out for him who fears Him,
3. And provide for him from where he does not reckon.
God is sufficient for him who places his trust in Him.
Certainly God fulfills His purpose.
God has indeed fixed a measure of every thing.

¹²⁶ A litter, usually built to carry two people, mounted on the back of a camel or other animal that people ride.

¹²⁷ See note 48.

¹²⁸ A laxative.

¹²⁹ There is in the original a play on words here: *kharand* means both "they are asses" and "they buy."

¹³⁰ Quran, Sura 36:60. Here are verses 55-64

55. Surely the inmates of Paradise
will be engaged in pastimes.
56. They and their companions will recline
on couches in the shade.
57. For them will be fruits and whatever they ask.
58. "Peace" shall be the greeting from the merciful Lord.
59. (And the guilty shall be told:) "O sinners, separate yourselves this day.
60. Did I not commit you, O children of Adam,
not to worship Satan who is your acknowledged foe,
61. But to serve Me; (that) this is the straight path?
62. But he beguiled a great many of you.
Why did you not then understand?
63. This is the Hell that you were promised.
64. Roast in it now for having disbelieved."

¹³¹ Rehatsek here quotes the first verse of Sura 97 (this is from the translation of the Quran that Rehatsek used, not the one I've been using): "Verily we sent down the Quran in the night of Qadr." And here is Rehatsek's note: "The word Qadr signifies 'power, honour, dignity', and this night is so named from its excellence above all other nights in the year. On this night Muhammad received his first revelation, when the Quran was sent down from the 'Preserved Table' near God's throne, entire in one volume to the lowest heaven, from which Gabriel revealed it to Muhammad in parcels as occasion required."

¹³² Wandering religious beggars.

¹³³ Which is a sign of pride.

¹³⁴ See note 122.

¹³⁵ According to Rehatsek, this word referred originally to those who read the Zend scriptures, the Zoroastrians, but it came over time to refer to all unbelievers.

¹³⁶ Alexander the Great.

¹³⁷ See note 132.

¹³⁸ According to Rehatsek, the literal translation here is "draw the blue finger over all your household furniture." Blue robes signified that the wearer was a religious man.

¹³⁹ A well-known author and spiritual guide of Saadi's time.

¹⁴⁰ The story of Laila and Majnun is sometimes compared to that of Romeo and Juliet because in each the lovers are "star-crossed," prevented by fate and circumstance from being together.

¹⁴¹ A farsakh corresponds to a distance of approximately three miles.

¹⁴² Quran, Sura 12:18. "They" are Joseph's brothers and "their father" is Jacob. The Quran's version of this story differs from the one in Genesis in interesting ways. Here are verses 7-20 from Sura 12. Compare them and the verses that precede and follow to Genesis 37 and the following chapters.

7. In the story of Joseph and his brothers
are lessons for those who inquire.
8. "Surely Joseph and his brother are dearer
to our father than we," (said his half-brothers),
"even though we are a well-knit band.
Our father is surely in the wrong.
9. Let us kill Joseph or cast him in some distant land
so that we may get our father's exclusive affection;
then play innocent."
10. One of them said: "If you must do so,
then do not kill Joseph,
but throw him into an unused well.
Some passing caravan may rescue him."
11. (Then going to their father) they said:
"O father, why don't you trust us with Joseph?
We are in fact his well-wishers.
12. Let him go out with us tomorrow
that he may enjoy and play.
We shall take care of him."
13. He said: "I am afraid of sending him with you
lest a wolf should devour him when you are unmindful."
14. They replied: "If a wolf should devour him
when we are there, a well-knit band,
we shall certainly be treacherous."
15. So, when they took him out they planned
to throw him into an unused well.
We revealed to Joseph: "You will tell them (one day)
of this deed when they will not apprehend it."
16. At nightfall they came to their father weeping,
17. And said: "We went racing with one another
and left Joseph to guard out things
when a wolf devoured him.
But you will not believe us even though
we tell the truth.
18. They showed him the shirt with the false blood on it.
(Their father) said: "It is not so;
you have made it up to story.
Yet endurance is best.
I seek the help of God alone for what you impute."
19. A caravan happened to pass, and sent

the water-carrier to bring water from the well.
 He let down his bucket
 (and pulled Joseph up with it).
 "What luck," said the man; "here is a boy;"
 and they hid him as an item of merchandise;
 but what they did was known to God.
 20. And they sold him as worthless
 for a few paltry dirham.

¹⁴³ Quran, Sura 32:21-22 Here are verses 12-22:

12. If only you could see when the sinners will stand
 before their Lord, heads hung low, (and say):
 "O Lord, we have seen and heard.
 So send us back. We shall do the right,
 for we have come to believe with certainty."
 13. Had We intended We could have given
 every soul its guidance;
 but inevitable is My word that I will fill up Hell
 with men and jinns together.
 14. So now suffer. As you forgot
 the meeting of this your Day of Doom,
 so have We forgotten you.
 Now taste the everlasting punishment for your deeds.
 15. Only they believe in Our revelations
 who, when they are reminded, bow in adoration,
 and give praise to their Lord, and do not become arrogant.
 16. Their backs do not rest on their beds,
 and they pray to their Lord in fear and hope,
 and spend of what We have given them (in charity).
 17. No soul knows what peace and joy lie hidden from them
 as reward for what they have done.
 18. Is one who is a believer like one who is a transgressor?
 No, they are not alike.
 19. As for those who disobey, their abode is Hell.
 Whensoever they wish to escape from it,
 they would be dragged back into it,
 and told: "Taste the torment of the Fire
 which you used to call a lie."
 21. But We shall make them taste the affliction of this world

before the greater torment
so that they may retract.
22. Who is more wicked than he
who is reminded of his Lord's revelations
yet turns away from them;
We will surely requite the sinners.