

13

Hafiz and His Translator, Sufism and God*Paul Smith**Poet and Translator*

I will start this paper by presenting my version of what I believe to be one of Hafiz's most important *ghazals*.

Praise be to God what wonderful wealth's given to me tonight;
Because my Divine Beloved came to me, quite suddenly, tonight.

The moment I saw Beloved's beautiful; face I bowed in praise;
Thanks be to the Grace of God, I'm fortunately happy tonight.

The seed of my infinite patience has now blossomed this Union;
I'm harvesting fruit of my patience, Fortune's with me tonight.

My slumbering destiny has awakened and is finally approved;
It is my life's luckiest night, for I hold the guarantee tonight.

I've resolved that even if my head's cut off it doesn't matter;
Removing the world's veil, Secret shown by me will be tonight.

My blood will write 'I am The Truth' (*Anal Haq*) on the earth,
If like Mansur they kill me on the gallows mercilessly tonight.

Beloved, You possess Divine Wealth, I'm beggar at Your door,
Give the gift of Your Glory, make me blissfully happy tonight.

All the time I'm frightened that Hafiz will be lost, obliterated;
Because each moment I'm in possession of such ecstasy tonight.¹

The reasons why I chose this poem to read are, first, that it tells us the consciousness Hafiz finally gained: that of being perfectly conscious of being man and God, as *Qutub*, as a Perfect Master; and second, because it was the first poem of Hafiz that I ever worked on, and I thought I should tell you how I came to do these versions of Hafiz, without any knowledge of the Persian language whatsoever. I still have no knowledge of this language. How is it possible for somebody to translate or do versions such that many Persian scholars have written to me and exclaimed how they are the closest ever done of the poems of Hafiz? How is it possible for someone without a word of the language to have done this? I have often said: "It's a miracle", and it is.

I will now quickly tell you how I came to do this: that is, translate every single poem of Hafiz, as well as writing his whole life story, which no one, including Iranians, knew; also how I produced a treatise on the meaning of his poems and the forms in which Hafiz wrote, as well as about his influence on the East and West, and the use of his book, the *Divan*, as an oracle.

¹ *Divan of Hafiz* (English version by Paul Smith. New Humanity Books, in 2 vols.), Melbourne, 1986, *Ghaz.* 217.

Back in 1966 I read a book about the Persian Indian Spiritual Master, Merwan Irani (or Meher Baba) called *The God-Man*² written by C.B. Purdom. Meher Baba was a great lover of the poems of Hafiz; he knew them all off by heart. His father, who was a great dervish, Sheriar Irani, and who walked to India from Iran, also knew them all off by heart, and in the book I read Meher Baba stated that Hafiz was the greatest poet who ever lived and that he had never been properly translated into English. The moment I read those words it came into my mind that I would one day do that. I thought this was a ridiculous thing for me to think because I have no ability with languages - they go in one ear and out the other - but that thought for some reason had nonetheless come into my mind.

The other thing that Meher Baba stated was that Hafiz was the greatest poet who ever lived. I considered myself a poet; I had been composing poems since childhood; I had been reading my poems at universities, small cafes in Melbourne: off-beat - free-form poems like those of many modern American poets - and I had read a little of Chinese and Indian poetry. But I had never heard of Hafiz or read anything about Persian poetry. When I read that he was considered the greatest poet who ever lived, I thought I should find out who he was, and so I went to the library and obtained every English version I could and every article touching on Hafiz, reading and becoming increasingly fascinated by them over the next eight years. I collected 102 translations of Hafiz into English alone. And of those 102 scholars, poets and others who had done any translating into English, only two made complete versions. H. Wilberforce Clarke³ rendered a complete literal version, and John Payne⁴ did a complete poetic version. Some scholars translated only one poem, some twenty, some fifty, etc. Apart from his being translated into many other languages, Hafiz has probably been translated into English more than any other poet or writer, and by more people than anyone else, although really without any great publishing success, from about the year 1630 until now. What I discovered was that the more I read the English versions of Hafiz the more and more I realized Meher Baba's insights were true; no translation contained what he and others who could understand the original described as the essence of Hafiz. The only way that I could read Hafiz in his purity, or get close to what he was all about, was either to learn the language - many years undertaking for such subtle texts - or, to attempt somehow an entry to the essence of Hafiz's experience through the various versions I had read.

Then I read a book by Masud Farzaad, the great Iranian scholar and poet who spent his whole life compiling and authenticating the variorum edition of Hafiz, *Haafez and His Poems*,⁵ in which he states that the only way Hafiz will ever be translated successfully into English would be by an Iranian scholar and an English poet combining their efforts. I thought, 'well, I'm the English poet but I don't have the Iranian scholar'. I tried desperately to find someone to work with me yet unsuccessfully, and then I realized that many of the scholars who had already translated Hafiz into English, H. Wilberforce Clarke and others were *all* scholars of Iranian literature, many of them being Iranian in nationality, along with Indians, English, French, Americans, and so I had the scholars already - about a hundred of them - and I was left as the English poet. I decided to go ahead.

I had not only been studying Hafiz during this period, but also the work of the other Master Sufi poets, the history of the period and earlier Persian history, the Koran, and anything at all that would help me in my work and in understanding Hafiz's consciousness. What I also had to do was discover what the *ghazal* was, as the form of poetry known as the *ghazal* had never been properly used in English verse. I thought that, if I could make the *ghazal* natural to my own poetry, then it would come naturally when I worked on the poems of Hafiz. I spent a year or so trying to write *ghazals* and I read many papers on the *ghazal*, how it is formed, what the *ghazal* actually is, and, every time

² C.B. Purdom, *The God-Man*, London, 1964.

³ *The Divan of Hafiz* (trans. by H. Wilberforce Clarke, Calcutta 1891, 2 vols.

⁴ *The Poems of Shemseddin Mohammed Hafiz of Shiraz* (trans. John Payne), Villon Society edn., Leiden, 1901.

⁵ *Haafez and His Poems* (trans. Masud Farzaad), London 1949.

wrote down what I thought was a *ghazal* in form and spirit, I would discover later had at least one element of a *ghazal* missing. Then, one night, a deep feeling of profound nostalgia came over me - what we would call 'the blues'. I felt a desperate longing to be united with my own true self, to be united with God. With that feeling I found myself scratching the back of my head - which for me always means that a poem is coming on - and I sat down and I allowed that feeling to come out in a poem. I went back to bed, slept, and the next morning, on reading it, I discovered it was a *ghazal* in every way. I had finally achieved one! I had studied all the technical aspects with my mind but I had not experienced that yearning, that contraction between the heart and the mind in all Hafiz's poems - that great tension of the opposites between the heart and mind, or *kabz* and *babz*, as the Sufis say.

After that I wrote hundreds of my own *ghazals* until the form became clear and natural for me. Finally, one morning I sat down with all the versions of Hafiz that I had - lining them up - and I opened up at random the *Divan*. Starting with H. Wilberforce Clarke's version, the most complete translation up until then, I opened it at the poem that I have just read, and I then looked at the five or six versions in my possession, from which a process began. I would read the first couplet after reading a complete poem of all the versions, and then I would blank out my mind, pray to God and to Hafiz, and wait ... and when the first line would come into my head, I would write it down, then the second line and so on. I could then work then on the rest of the poems once I had the rhyme structure. I did this on the above-read poem and 150 poems of Hafiz, and it took me about a year and a half. The more I read those poems in translation the more I thought that they seemed to be intellectual, wooden; they lacked something that I felt in his best translators were fundamentally Hafiz: some passion, sense of humour, divinity, or whatever. I sensed my versions still lacked this weakness.

It was difficult doing these poems, since I was working during the day and doing my writing at night. I got very little sleep, and we had recently adopted a seven year old Cambodian girl who spoke little English and we no Cambodian. I reached the point where I could not carry on with it anymore. It was too much. As I sat in front of the poems one night I simply said: "This is enough, I give up"; and I felt such relief that I did not have to undertake this task any more. A great burden lifted from me. But immediately after I gave up a voice said into my ear, almost bursting my eardrum: "you fool! you fool!" I felt the breath in my ear, "you fool, the trouble with you is you've been doing them for yourself; do one, just one for Me and I'll help you". I knew who it was, and it scared the hell out of me; and, I responded, 'no, if I try to do one, I'm back in there again ... I'll have to do the rest. I'll be caught up in it again'. "Pick up the pen...PICK UP THAT PEN". By then, I was frightened. I've heard God's voice before, but nothing as insistent as this. Poets hear God's voice, if they're interested in discovering their true selves. It was Hafiz; it was God!

I picked up the pen and then looked at the book, and the pen wrote and wrote and the *ghazal* was translated in minutes. The beauty - everything was there - I could see it all, as it was coming out. I was the vessel, I watched it happen. One after another, twelve *ghazals* in half an hour! Beautiful, they had everything: they sparkled, they shone. Everything.

I then went to bed and fell asleep. That night I dreamt that I was a small boy and I was standing next to Hafiz, holding his hand. Hafiz was small and ugly. We were walking around the garden where his tomb is in Shiraz. His tomb-shrine was as it is now. People were walking up and bowing down. I said to him: "Isn't it terrible that you're lying there, dead?"

He burst out laughing. It was the most wonderful laugh I have ever heard. Obviously, he wasn't lying there dead, and there was his *Divan* I was working on, and I was holding his hand. He wasn't, isn't dead. But, his laugh was so catchable, as some are. I burst out laughing and I woke up laughing and woke my wife - who burst out laughing also, for it was so infectious. I thought later, 'what was that laughter of Hafiz? What was it?' I realized it contained two elements: one, he was laughing for the sheer joy of laughing; and two, he recognized the sense of irony in the joke that I had made unconsciously.

So, for me, that was the last element in Hafiz's poems to discover: his joy of life and laughter and his great sense of irony. I started on the poems again and re-did the 150 and worked my way through the rest of his poems, which took the next ten years. Of course as I got better at them they took less time. Most of his poems took many drafts to complete. Often it would be a partnership where his pen would move and I would watch it. Many times I would go to sleep and I dream of doing a Hafiz poem, and the next day would open the book at that poem and know exactly how to translate it.

Hafiz is totally magical. If we think of Hafiz as only a great poet then we are missing virtually all of who he is. And Hafiz is not dead; he did not cease to exist 600 years ago. Hafiz is living today as much as ever and is available always, not just through his book, but in the receptacle of our own hearts. I have many stories that I could tell you where he has helped me in the most wonderful, strangest ways in different circumstances all over the world, and this of course happens to many other people.

After studying his poems, completing the writing of them, as well as reading many pertinent books and articles, I was forced to ask very seriously — 'Who, then, is Hafiz—what is his life story?' Many Iranian friends I talked to had very little knowledge of the circumstances of his life; they knew only the poems and a few incidents. Often their knowledge of these incidents were conflicting. This morning I asked an Iranian: 'What do you know of Hafiz?' She replied, 'He was married to Shakh-i-Nabat'. He was not married to her, however, as research has shown. He was in love with her but was married to someone else, had a son with her, and Shakh-i-Nabat was his 'muse', for want of a better word, and through his love for her his human love became divine love with the help of his spiritual Master Mohammed Attar. Iranians generally know very little about Hafiz apart from his poems. I discovered that scholars and others had uncovered much about Hafiz. When you read the last 300 years of treatises about Hafiz, by various scholars from Iran and other parts of the world, they have found out a little here, a little there, some information here, that he did this or that at a certain time, that his son died in mysterious circumstances, that his Master was Mohammed Attar, that he kept his Master's identity a secret until he was so frustrated with Attar that he divulged his identity to two travelling merchants, and so on. Some time later in his life Hafiz travelled to the coast and caught a ship to India where he had been invited to go by a prince. His fellow travellers later wrote a book and mentioned their meeting him, and through this book, found some time ago in the Soviet Union⁶ and subsequently translated, we can confirm his Master's identity.

Hafiz had become so sick and tired of being refused being given God-consciousness by his Master that he had left his Master for a while. This consciousness was eventually given to him, as revealed in the poem read at the beginning of this piece. And so this information is available. His life story is now known. In my book I tell his whole life story, and in the stage play and film that I have created I tell his story even more completely. Admittedly I expand the role of some characters and make others smaller. but that is the art of stage and film writing. In my introduction to his *Divan*, though, I did not do that. There I only stated what has truly been discovered and through detection have put all the pieces of the jigsaw of his life story together. Once his life is seen as a whole, all his poems seem to make a lot more sense. You can understand when he wrote them. I can tell you when Hafiz wrote any of his poems. His life is still a mystery to most Iranians, but it is no longer a mystery to me, and I do not even know the language! How is it possible?

I say it is possible because Hafiz is God in human form and THAT is the essence of Sufism. I have been asked to write on Sufism, and Hafiz has taken all the attention, but if you want to talk about Sufism, then Hafiz was the ultimate Sufi; Mohammed was the ultimate Sufi, as was Adam, Jesus Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Rumi. A Sufi is someone who believes in God in human form, that God does not just exist in the abstract; that God created this Creation through His Imagination and then He entered it.

⁶ J. Rypka et al., *History of Iranian Literature* (ed. K. Jahn), Dordrecht, 1968, p. 276, n. 89.

Hafiz talks about the day of *'Alast*, when God created in His unlimited Imagination every possible being that was ever possible to create in this vast room of Creation. He created all of us, everyone and everything, in His Imagination. And then He stepped on to and into the stage of Creation, and He said to everyone and everything: 'Am I NOT your God?' The Persian word for 'not' is a trick word, meaning calamity as well as 'not'. What are you supposed to answer? It is a sick joke, is it not? This is all a joke, the whole of Creation. Hafiz sees that. It is a joke that God has played on us. What are we supposed to say: 'Yes, you are not our God?' 'Yes'; that is what we are supposed to say. Hafiz says that some did not answer, and others said: 'Yes!' Why? Because it was good manners. It is good manners to answer someone when they ask a question in recognition of their existence. What is the answer? Maybe the answer is any answer. Hafiz says he remembers doing that in pre-eternity. Then God manifested everyone and everything into Creation through the Mental World, through the world of Energy and into the world of form. Everything that would ever be. Hafiz says there were two types of souls, two types of beings. There were those that answered: 'Yes!' and the others were those who did not answer. He says those answering 'Yes' were the lovers, the lovers of God. They had the courage to make the mistake. He says that those who did not answer have to listen and learn from those who did, so that they can make that mistake. Thus those that answered were the Sufis, for they recognized the existence of God in this whole calamity, so that when God appears on earth in human form - as the Messiah, the *Rasul*, the *Avatar*, or the Buddha, or whatever you want to call Him - when He, God who manifested everything, takes birth; if we do not say 'yes' to Him we are not saying 'yes' to the most important fact in the whole of Creation.

Now, it is also possible for us to become God-conscious, conscious of Who created us, what we really are, and Hafiz became God-conscious through the fact and love of somebody else who was God-conscious - Mohammed Attar. And Attar became God-conscious from another *Qutub* or Perfect Master or Man-God. Hafiz recognizes throughout his poems these beings, these Perfect Masters, calling them 'Dervishes'. Hafiz did not like being called a *sufi* because there are many false sufis wearing blue robes and having certain rituals or in rags, and in making out they were poor were really taking money off people. Hafiz's sufism was an inner thing and he preferred to be called a 'Dervish'. When he talks about dervishes in the ultimate sense he is talking about those who have eliminated the ego and have become united with God, those to whom the world is but an illusion. He wrote a powerful poem about such beings, these Dervishes:

Paradise's Garden of Eternity is the sanctuary of Dervishes;
The Ultimate Power's source is in the slavery of Dervishes.

The Treasury of Seclusion containing a wonderful Talisman:
It's unlocking is in the glance, giving bravery, of Dervishes.

The pleasure Rizvan has as doorkeeper of Paradise's palace,
Is only a view of Garden's pleasing symmetry of Dervishes.

That, by reflection of which dark base metal becomes gold,
Is by the alchemy that is in the camaraderie of Dervishes.

That grandeur to which high sun bows his glorious crown,
Is the humble home of the dignified mastery of Dervishes.

That great wealth, of which there is no fear of destruction,
Hear the Truth told plainly: it is the treasury of Dervishes.

When kings are altars to which wordly people pray for help,
It's because they serve the majestic ancestry of Dervishes.

Pole to pole oppression's army stretches across the earth;
But, beginningless to endless Eternity is victory of Dervishes.

Kings are offering prayers for fulfilment of their objectives;
Desired object is mirrored from face's imagery of Dervishes.

O wealthy man, do not proudly boast about all your riches;
Life and gold come from benevolent treasury of Dervishes.

Karun and his great treasure are still sinking into the earth;
You'll have heard, this results from effrontery of Dervishes.

I'm the slave of the glance of the Asaf, the Chief of the age,
Who is outwardly regal, wears inwardly, finery of Dervishes.

Now you be full of respect here in such Blessed Company:
Kings and angels stand respectfully in gallery of Dervishes.

Hafiz, if you're seeking to gain the Water of Everlasting Life;
Its fountain's source is in dust of the sanctuary of Dervishes.⁷

What I also intended to talk about here was Hafiz's influence. The Iranian public, and the world for that matter, do not understand how influential Hafiz has been, not just as a poet, but also on another level that I would call 'spiritual'. The consciousness of the world is not changed by politicians, or poets, or artists, or the ordinary people, or historians; the consciousness of the world is changed by God in human form: by those who are brave enough to give up everything (including the ego) and become united with God, their own true self. Formal religion - including its priests and all rituals - is just a continuation of ignorance. Hafiz states in his poems again and again that the world and its works are as 'nothing into nothing', that only love which is the bridge to divine love is of any worth in this world.

At the time of Hafiz the change in consciousness that had been brought about by the God-man Muhammed was that of Reason, and Hafiz went on to advocate *rind* or unreason or divine madness or love-intoxication or whatever you want to call it. It was the inner path of Love, and that path is also the path of Intuition: to balance the heart and the mind, but to always see that the heart is the most important. It is only recently, I think, and as Gertrude Bell maintains, that Hafiz's mode of consciousness has become manifest in many people. Gertrude Bell, a Hafiz scholar, has stated: "It is as if his mental eye, endowed with wonderful acuteness of vision, had penetrated into those provinces of thought which we of a later age were destined to inhabit."⁸ What she means is that Hafiz wrote intuitively, he wrote in a form that manifested his feelings in an intuitive fashion, and many people today are beginning to take on that same consciousness so that he is more relevant for today than at any other time. That is why so many people throughout the world are now discovering Hafiz.

I have written in my book of Hafiz's influence on the East and the West, and I can tell you it is vast. There is very little art in the west and east not affected by him. Impressionism, Romanticism,

⁷ *Dirvan of Hafiz* (Smith), *Ghaz.* 36.

⁸ *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz* (trans. Gertrude Bell), London, 1897.

Surrealism, they all come from Hafiz; because Hafiz has existed. Hafiz was the spiritual Master of Goethe and Emerson, greatly influenced the Russians Pushkin, Fet, Yesenin; the Germanics Nietzsche and Junger; the French writers Hugo and Klingsor; the British Byron, Swinburne, Moore, and the Spaniard Lorca (who wrote an essay on Hafiz and gypsy music). His influence on the poetry and art and mysticism of India and the Middle East is beyond compare.

The idea of the *rind* or the 'outsider' which Hafiz introduced was eventually taken up in Europe in Russia and then the rest of the West. The 'outsider' of Hafiz is one outside the formal religious patterns and one whose consciousness has been internalized. When I was in the United States giving a spontaneous talk on Hafiz I talked for three and a half hours and I felt I had barely scratched the surface, such is the depth and magnitude of Hafiz and his great work. It is even more the case in this small presentation.

In conclusion, I would like to read two more of his *ghazals* which I've put into English about the state of consciousness that he achieved and that we all, God willing, will one day experience:

Separation day and severance night from Beloved at last is ended;
This grief, as lucky star has passed and my fortune cast, is ended.

All of the heart's grief, and those long cold dark worrying nights
In the shadow of lovely form's long hair that's overcast, is ended.

Although it was my way to be at first tangled by that long hair,
The problem-knot of entanglement, by Your face at last is ended.

To the dawn of Hope worshipping from behind the hidden screen,
Say: "Break out and see, dark nights work is in the past, is ended."

False pride of face of Autumn that weary waiting Winter showed,
With arrival of footsteps of the breeze of Spring, at last is ended.

Thanks to God that by fortune of crown that caps rosebud's peak,
The mighty thorn and pompous December wind's blast is ended.

From now on, light will shine from our heart across the horizon,
For we have reached the Sun and the dust is in the past, is ended.

And now with the harp and drum to the Winehouse I'll be going;
With grace of Union with Beloved, grief's story at last is ended.

Wineseller, You showed kindness, Your goblet be full of the best!
By Your management, vinecausing sickness is outcast, is ended.

Although true consideration and praise due to Hafiz no one gives,
Thank God his occupation of grief, beyond estimate, vast, is ended.⁹

Last night before dawn, freedom from all suffering They gave me;
In the darkness of night, Water of Life-everlasting, They gave me.

⁹ *Divan of Hafiz* (Smith), *Ghaz.* 192.

They overpowered me with the brilliance of the Divine Essence;
A drink from the goblet of Divine Light overflowing, They gave me.

What a fortunate dawn and joyful night was that Night of Power
When the Supreme Authority of God's Commanding They gave me.

When I swooned with awe and wonder from love for Love's Face,
The two goddesses Lat and Manat's true meaning They gave me.

If my longing is fulfilled and my heart is in bliss, what wonder?
All of this as rightful gifts, because I was deserving They gave me.

Now, together are my face and the mirror of the Glory of Beauty:
Beloved's Glory reflecting my true Self showing, They gave me.

All this honey and sugar that's pouring from my pen is the reward
For patience; and a branch of sugarcane for writing They gave me.

Angel Gabriel the invisible messenger, gave me the happiest news:
When tyranny and violence comes, patience enduring They gave me.

It's such a wonderful miracle to be the slave of the Perfect Master:
I became His dust and the rank of the highest rating They gave me.

The Master raised me that day to reach to life Eternal without end;
When the writing of freedom from death, everlasting, They gave me.

Hafiz said: "The moment I fell into the snare of the tip of Your hair,
Release from the chains of anguish and of suffering They gave me."

Because of blessings I received and wishes of dawn companions,
Freedom from Fate's sickness and Time's grieving They have me.

Hafiz, rejoice, rejoice, then thankfully scatter the sugar of thanks:
Realization of the Divine Beloved, sweetly swaying, They gave me.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.