

An Alphabet of Ghazals*

by

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*Ghazal: (pronounced 'guzzle'), an ancient form of Persian poetry
favored by mystics, saints and Masters.

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Introduction

Ghazals are devotional poems to God. They contain advice to aspirants; they convey the experience of the soul on the spiritual path; they are instructional, disquieting and paradoxical; the poets use metaphors, parables and allegories. Although the words are the same, the language of the soul is different from the language of the mind.

The intent of the ghazal is to woo the Beloved, not to titillate the mind. They are poems from the heart. What matters is the innocence and purity of the heart's expression laid bare before the world - not cleverness. They are primal expressions that are meant to provoke a response from their audience, as if God could be brought down to Earth by the passion and eloquence of the poet. To an audience appreciative of the ghazal form, a well turned phrase that captures that experience brings a sigh of approval. It is said that the word itself, ghazal, is the sound a deer makes when its heart is pierced by an arrow. In this case, the arrow is the spoken word and aimed at the human heart.

The original Urdu, or Persian, versions have a fixed meter and syllable length set to couplets. I've made no attempt to follow any particular phrase length, pattern or form. Ghazals always contain the "signature" of the author. Where ever this device would have alienated my audience, I substituted the personal pronoun. Mystic poets have enjoyed giving advice to spiritual aspirants for centuries or abused those who appeared to be materialistic. I have tried to keep this to a minimum. Sanctimonious polemic is always irritating at best. I have deliberately taken many liberties with the ghazal poetic form. It has proven to be the only vehicle that brings wings to my heart. My intent has been to convey experiences meant to make you cry, laugh, quiet your mind, make you appreciate being both human and divine.

These poems are meant to be read out loud. Whether read out loud or to oneself, the rhythm should be discovered and respected. Some phrases at first won't seem to fall on the beat. The rhythms are complex,

like the blues or East Indian music. Although some sentences run through several stanzas, they should be read as complete sentences. The punctuation and capitalization of words will be your only guide. Some phrases are non-grammatical, i.e., they are phrases without verbs, connected to grammatical phrases with commas, terminating with periods, question marks or exclamation marks. What mattered to me was the emotional impact - not the grammar.

Reading these ghazals out loud requires full self-expression. They are the out-pouring of the soul, beyond the ordinary conversations that circumscribe our lives. The quality of my life, I believe, is determined by what I say and do. If I want real love, I must speak to my loved ones in the language of love, not in oblique messages. If you should read these ghazals out loud and break through any self-consciousness you may have in doing so, you may discover the poetry and passion within you. If you begin to speak to others in the language of the heart - your heart - then you will inspire the love that you seek. If you should feel tears in your eyes as you read the poems, let yourself go and weep wholeheartedly. Ecstasy and pain seem to go hand in hand throughout life.

When I was in India in 1974 making a pilgrimage to the tomb of Meher Baba, a disciple of his, Eruch, pointed to a tree and said, looking at me pointedly, "Michael, after forty years, on its own accord, the sandalwood tree breaks open releasing its fragrance."

It's taken many years to age the wine that is offered on these pages. Enjoy it! I tapped the barrel for your enjoyment as well as mine.

Michael Childs

1-31-94

Sausalito, California

Ghazal A

Every night I make my bed,
but you do not come to comfort me.

Every night, I set my lamp to lead you to me,
but you pass me by.

Every day I clean my house of dust and cobwebs,
but the spiders never sleep.

Self-righteous fools speak of love
with hearts encased in stone;

better that they should weep with pain
than build more walls.

Dangling helpless in your silken web,
consumed with pain and ecstasy,

their words are epitaphs for my tomb while
I wait for you, Master Cobweb Builder;

Knower of my heart and mind! Deliverer of my soul!
Lord! Break the thread that binds me!

Ghazal B

I'm looking for the perfect gift,
something that would suit your face,

a nothing something to compliment
the twinkle of your eyes,

a whiff of fragrance wafting
to tantalize your nose,

a pas-de-deux to catch your eye,
a simile to snare a smile.

While others kill to keep their dreams,
weep and seek revenge,

I play the fool to win your heart,
O, Fool of Fools, Wrecker of my dreams:

Anything, Lord, to bring you to me!
Anything, to please you!

Ghazal C

It's seven o'clock and twilight falls
gently, gray upon the hills.

The sky's blue deepens into the
silvery hues of butterfly wings,

while wispy clouds resonate with the
sun's last cry as it disappears into the darkness,

leaving me in darkness,
brooding, immersed

in the twilight of my mind,
where light is but a memory,

a fairy tale of homilies,
platitudes and lies,

of pleasures lost and pain remembered,
heartbreak and despair,

of childhood's hopes and myths destroyed
by cruelty and deceit.

When my thoughts have spiraled into blackness,
and my heart feels like stone,

I think of Thee, fey lover who
teases me with Bliss,

strips me of all that I possess, and
laughs at my nakedness.

The sun will dawn tomorrow,

I will gaze upon your brilliance, and

blinded, will become the sun,
unblemished by the night.

Ghazal D

Where are you, gentle lover
who seeks me with your gaze?

Behind a tree? In my lover's arms?
In clouds? Or never ending roads?

Where are you now, my hummingbird,
flitting before my sight?

At this blossom, or at that?
Mysterious little bird beyond my reach!

Now I seek you, now I don't;
lost in daydreams and life's demands,

your beauty makes me wonder;
I turn in thought to find you gone!

Where are you now? And now? And now?
Who am I that forgets to forget

myself and seek myself in you
who are my Self

even in my forgetfulness?
Reeling before the onslaught of my mind,

I pull the trap set for you,
only to find it empty.

Ghazal E

Caressing soft silken thighs,
wet kisses seeking wetness,

fingertips glide along inviting skin,
hearts pounding, arms entwined,

with glazed eyes and trembling breath,
I feel you writhe beneath me.

The damp, the pungent smells,
the all absorbing closeness,

clasped behind me, your arms bring me to you,
gently moaning, undulating,

all attention focused on your pleasure
and on you pleasing me;

the need, the drive, the crescendo
of gasping breaths and sighs,

disappearing in a burst of wetness,
warmth, forgetfulness and smiles.

I ask you, "Lord, is this dance that
celebrates the Earth as wrong as we are told?

Or is it another facet of your love for us
in the Game of Hide-and-Seek?"

"Yes", You say, "As long as you remember
you are making love to Me!"

Ghazal F

When my desires outstripped my common sense,
and bedded me in Hell,

I grabbed my penis in one hand
and cursed it for its blindness!

"What good can come from this", I cried,
"When all I see is sorrow?"

The tears, the anguish, the angry words,
the pain, the grief, the loss!

What of the children and their anxious faces?
The averted eyes and dismal hope?

Is this the fate you've cursed me to?
Is this my legacy for them?"

Railing thus against my mind,
I turned to you and wept.

Caught between two extremes,
neither one brought peace:

If I sublimated my desire,
my mind seethed behind a mask,

If I gave vent to my needs,
I felt empty.

"What is your Desire", I asked you,
"Inventor of the Game?"

From the very bowels of the Earth

came the answer: "Fool!

How can you escape the very force
that binds the Universe together?

Take your hand from your penis
and place it on your heart!

There is no escape until I will it!
Until then: Surrender and be happy!"

Ghazal G

I yearn for my pleasure
like I yearn for you,

but, once attained,
a dissatisfaction still remains;

Over and over, the cycle turns and turns,
never closer, never further, never the final

embrace that would be my end and my beginning,
the one in which I find myself embracing Self:

the Universe disappearing;
the Glance, the Touch, the Bliss of being One!

the Stillness of the very core that
blazes forth Creation!

I seek that union with Thee, Lord!
Thou art the woman of my heart, the mistress of my soul!

Like Odysseus on his way to Penelope,
I have been with others, but always true to Thee!

Touch me! Caress me! Take me in your arms!
You are my Soul, my only love, the One whom I adore!

Inconstant, faithless, a traitor to your Name, shameless, and brazen,
I stand before your Door.

Ghazal H

"But, Lord," I argue, "Isn't sex a trap,
that lures me away from you?"

losing me in false pleasures,
counterfeits of love?"

"Michael, were I not Infinitely Patient,
you would try my patience;

Listen well, listen deep;
this is the secret of the Game:

A woman isn't happy unless you make love to her;
she is the Earth, a blossom soft and tender,

do what comes naturally;
your pursuit will please her,

by pleasing her, you will please me,
for I am you and you are me.

Your seed will bring forth children
who will blossom in your love;

In that flowering of love, you will understand
the purpose of the Universe;

appreciate the paradise I made for you
as you journey towards the goal.

When your hearts become as one,
reaching deeper into silence,

you will discover there my heart,

singing in its splendor.

As you learn to love each other,
you will learn to love me.

Love is why I made you parts of me
unconscious of my love."

Ghazal I

I see him standing in the meadow,
looking in my direction.

Is my hair right? Does my dress become me?
Will he find me comely?

Casually, I look around,
a little laughter escapes my lips.

I smile, my cheeks are flushed,
I dare not look, but then I do.

His eyes reach mine, they blaze with light.
Instantly I drop my eyes.

Walking away, daring not to look,
I leave my heart behind me.

Will he follow? Will I see him
in the meadow of my love again?

Who is this handsome man who has my heart?
Does he come here often?

Questions and curiosity fill my mind,
confusion accompanies every step I make.

At last he's gone, but, oh,
my heart aches at his absence!

He knows how to unlock my heart,
yet, I am afraid to yield to him.

Michael says to you, Lord,

Since he cannot find you,

and as he is dressed in tatters,
nor has a young girl's charm or beauty,

flowing grace or softness,
his face scarred with battles,

furrowed deep with tears and cares,
he asks you with downcast eyes:

Will you meet me in the meadow
and gaze at me once more?

Ghazal J

Wandering in the underworld,
consumed with passion burning,

I searched for you among
prostitutes with painted smiles

and easy closeness for a pittance;
instead of buying their bodies, we talked:

What were they thinking?
What were they doing?

What drove them to sell
the only thing worth keeping?

The poverty, the despair
of lives eked out without purpose,

in tawdry rooms and instant pleasures,
their self-esteem in ruins,

reduced to bartering their bodies
for groceries and rent,

pleasure from the end of needles,
to escape the pain of living.

I see myself in them, Lord:
the lies, the compromise,

the self-deceits, the hopelessness,
the struggle to survive,

their simplicity, and good hearts

led to self-destruction by their minds;

Keeper of my heart! Salvation of my hopes!
How can you save me and not them?

Ghazal K

When I announced my plans to marry
Cecilia, my fourth such endeavor,

my friends thought me mad:
"There he goes carried off

by his genitals again!"
(inelegantly, but aptly put);

A sage said, "You know that sex is binding?"
"Yes", I replied without a pause,

"It is my path.
God promised me that married life

could bring me to the very door
of His Realization."

Regardless of past failures
to assail the gates of Heaven,

I plunged into the whirlpool again,
seeking the promised pearl.

And God has kept his promise!
Whether at the Door of Bliss or not

is of no importance and impossible to tell.
But such joy to hear his laughter in her voice!

Never have I felt such love for you, Lord!
You guard your secret well!

Ghazal L

I have a special friend.
His name is Ben. He is my son.

Full nine years old, with brown eyes,
and stocky build,

his smile is wide like a river
and sweet as blackberries.

We adore each other, he and I.
I made a promise to be worthy of his love,

and he, in turn, loves me
like I love God.

He defends me from attackers.
He yields his mind to me

(though it is often filled with
baseball cards and chewing gum).

I am honored with his simple conversations;
He is generous with his heart;

His love turned me away from thinking I was a failure.
It gave me purpose when I was lost.

Lord, what a gift you have given me!
To have you in a little body!

surrendering to my imperfect will.
You found another way to teach me, another way to reach me!

Thief of Thieves!

You stole my heart with my child's heart!

Ghazal M

What is the purpose of life?
What is the meaning of it all?

Why do people kill each other?
Why do children play?

What did you do today?
And yesterday? And did you know that

whales beach themselves and die?
That particles of dust make you sneeze?

Why and why and where and why and
what and why and how?

This is the quid pro quo that
forms the quilt work of our lives:

the conversations that fill the mind,
the questions that kill the heart,

the empty mindless time consuming
words and deeds that inch us closer to

the bleak and frightening end that is the
final answer to the question, "WHY?"

Friend, you are not to be found
in these perturbations of the Mind;

You are found between the cracks of thought
when the mind is stilled by paradox.

Lover of mine, you hold my chin with your

thumb and forefinger; looking deep into my eyes

I see your boundless love; bedazzled,
I forget to even ask you, "WHEN"?

Ghazal N

Clinking, clanking, chug-chug-chugging,
cloompalong, cloompalong,

rinkle, rinkle, ping and patter,
sounds of grease and metal,

rolling, round and round, and
clanging my whole day for

eighty-five dollars weekly and for
the honor of being subjected

to my boss' abuse and jeers:
"You think you're smart, but you're a jerk!

Don't write your music on the job!
And I'll dock you if you're late!"

Clinking, clanking, chug-chug-chugging,
the paper sheets keep coming.

Check the color and its depth,
check to make it perfect. Make sure

that we get paid to perfectly print
a piece of paper whose destiny is garbage.

I admit, Lord, that I liked the work,
even though I felt oppressed:

the camaraderie, the vulgar jokes,
the discipline of mastering expensive metal monsters

that did not allow for slackness,

being a part of the machinery of society.

Lord, even in those unpainted stifling rooms,
filled with dust and chemicals, the filthy toilets,

the heat and squalor, the sweat pouring off our brows,
I found you in the hearts of those that gave themselves

for their loved ones, living simple lives;
Thanks for teaching me to be a craftsman

and to disregard the clothes that cover us,
to see the soul within.

Ghazal O

I am five but I shall die tomorrow. I cannot feel my swollen stomach,
the ache that turned the color of my childhood into gray, and soon, to
blackness.

I cannot move. I cannot think. My life has been in vain.
Do other children run and play? I hope so for I have never.

Sadness and lethargy have enshrouded me since birth;
I sucked at breasts that had no milk, and supped more on dust than rice;

Why was I born to suffer and die a nameless death?
my body placed in a grave among thousands of the same,

with none to mourn my passing because all who knew me will be dead?
I have spent five years upon this Earth. For what?

To learn that life is an empty dream that walks on fragile legs?
That all is grayness and despair 'til Death relieves us of our pain?

I could have learned that when I was older. Why now at five?
I know that other children play. Why not me? Why is hunger all I know?

A cry pierces my lips: "Lord, I am dying! Over and over I feel the
children dying!
I feel their lives ground down for lack of rice and water! I cannot bear
the pain!

Lord, have you no pity on them? Do something to help them!
Relieve the misery in the world, Omnipotent one! Have you no
compassion?"

"Michael, now you have an inkling of the pain I suffer, for
everyone is part of me and I a part of them.

For ages and ages I come down to Earth and remind men to consider
what they do to others;
Instead of releasing the tears of guilt, they crucify Me on the cross of
their conscience!

If you feel the pain of others, this world I gave to you as Paradise will
you regain;
Take care of each other, for you are all one family: Mine!

The little boy I can help by giving him eternal Bliss.
What you can do is feed him!"

Ghazal P

Often, I see my past lives and weep.
There is no glory in them,

no pride, no famous names
over which to gloat or boast,

just mountains of arms and legs and heads
from battles I have fought,

women raped and screaming,
children stabbed and bleeding

wondering at the injustice of it all
that, by my hand, I had commanded;

I caused the death of
six thousand men crucified

on the Appian Way, for something
I never forgave myself:

I raised a slave revolt because of anger
and thousands died because of it.

It was a lie: "I'll take you to the promised land!"
Just a lie to make them angry

and a lie to give them hope,
a lie to cover my own wish to die.

"Better to die as freemen,
than live as slaves", I propounded,

resolved to lie about our bleak prospects

and the ships to carry us to freedom.

I ask you, Lord, and all those involved,
to forgive me this awful abuse of trust

for which, I feel, can have no forgiveness.
You replied: "You have always been forgiven,

now forgive yourself.
What happened is all past.

Those people followed you
because they loved you.

You gave them hope
and a sense of their own power,

that slaves, united, could defeat
the mightiest of armies.

Trust yourself to raise another army,
one that wages war on

War, Greed and Selfishness.
There is no promised land

except in your hearts and
the stillness of your minds.

And, if you should make mistakes, don't worry,
I will always love you."

Ghazal Q

It's been twenty years since that first encounter
when you tore the bandage from my eyes,

blinding me with your brilliance, reducing me to ashes,
leaving me despairing to see your Face again.

For ten years, I felt the pain smoldering deep
within my breast like magma waiting for release,

Anger surged upon me like squalls at sea.
Fury uncontained by guilt whipped emotions into mighty waves

that threatened others and humiliated me.
The fiercest hurricanes and I became kindred souls,

dashing ourselves upon the shore, upon your breast,
and still I turned and yearned and burned for you,

until life and death were nothing more than
copper coins thrown upon the ground!

Lord, what have you done to me?
I had little dreams of peace, respectability,

happiness and marriage, a place to call my own.
But not this!

Nothing prepared me for the agony that consumes me day and night.
Your love has laid me bare and naked to the core!

Ghazal R

Often I catch myself thinking of nothing,
or rather, something that defies description.

But if it was something why does it seem like nothing?
A nothing something totally absorbing

interrupted by telephones and customers, worldly duties,
worries that extinguish the absent present something nothing

that beckons through the garbage like running in a dream,
going nowhere and forgetting why.

I see you. I know it's you. You are neither male nor female,
nor an it, yet you are quite human. But more so.

You are everything. As I say that I try to crowd everything
into a little room and that's not it. Let me try that again.

Everything means everything before anything existed.
It could be nothing except that the nothing is full of everything.

O.K. Let's recapitulate: Lord, you are a nothing something that is totally
everything before anything existed, full and empty,
except that everything and nothing cannot be full or empty since
nothing exists in everything before anything existed.

Did I make myself clear?

All right, I admit it: I don't know what it is I'm seeing,
only I'm certain it is You.

Ghazal S

We have a friend who has AIDS.
This means he's dying.

Everyday comes as a gift,
tomorrow is his last.

He is gay, a 'king' no less!
sophisticated and witty.

Barbs pour off his tongue
stabbing everyone in sight:

and vituperatively destroys
humanity with his words

as his disease destroys him.
A vain attempt to stave

off the pain that eats him.
Living in a tiny room,

stuffed with stuffed animals,
pictures of naked men and penises

pinned on the wall,
keeping his 'queens' in line,

he shares the hidden world of gayness,
the language, and its pride.

Crowded in his little room,
we play Canasta

as drug pimps come and go,
leaving victims who are robbed

and killed for the drugs
used to obfuscate their fear

of dying like pariahs,
unwanted and unknown;

slowly consumed,
bit by bit,

swallowed by the Earth in one gulp
and then forgotten.

But I remember - and you, Omniscient One,
you hold them in your arms forever.

Ghazal T

It is in Ward 5 where Paul is lying,
dying with tubes running up his nose

to give the extra oxygen his lungs
cannot afford him, talking of his father,

his childhood somewhere in the Mid-West.
Every time he speaks he takes off his oxygen

mask, gasping, faintly rasping, etches the
story of his life, of being afraid to tell

his dad of him being gay, his family ashamed
to visit him as he withers in the ward,

stricken by a disease that stigmatizes them with failure.
(How can you forgive a child that has made you so wrong?)

that lets all the world know that you have failed as parents?
Best to disown the child and let him die forgotten,

than reach out past the prison in our minds that
keeps us from each other and from simply loving. And so,

Paul languishes in his bed, feebly reiterating the
outlines of his life before he's shifted to the final ward,

while a group of dedicated people cater delicious meals
served by a woman dressed as a French maid in mesh stockings

to people slowly dying, ebbing, drifting towards an end
that inexorably closes over them like dried flowers in a book.

Paul is gone, like Gordon, David, Richard,

Gary, Thomas, Charles and Bruce,

gone to see Death's ferry, to catch a glimpse
as You wait for them in all your glory.

Ghazal U

My clock has numbers and no hands.
No longer is it "about" 10 o'clock.

It is exactly 10:10.
Does this really matter?

At this very moment,
time is slow.

In one half hour,
there will be a split second race

to be on time to
something soon forgotten.

Lord, when I contemplate your You-ness,
(How else can I describe the indescribable?)

time is non-existent.
It is a leisurely evening spent

absorbing the smells of trees and
grass and flowers,

awe-struck by the sunset,
laughing at children playing,

lost in conversations that
lovers have who never seem to

say enough to satisfy each other.
The picture fades and crumbles:

"Hurry, Michael, you'll be late!"

and swept up by Time's torrent,

disappears in guilt for wasting precious seconds
that could have been more useful.

Lord, is it time to leave
or is it time to stay?

Someday, when it pleases you,
may I stay forever?

Ghazal V

People speak of Spring as a time of renewal
but clouds cover my little plot of land

when I think of my two children for whom I have been
dead for so many years.

When their mother first took them away,
my son, then just over one year old,

clutched for me in the empty air
as she took him on the plane.

My daughter and I used to play Bert and Mary Poppins.
We'd jump onto a small chalk board and

pretend we had emerged into a magic world
that only the two of us knew.

But I was the stoic son my father brought me
up to be. I held the tears back, until,

in a little group, I sobbed and sobbed
my heart out helplessly. The pain was like a knife

that stabbed me in the heart and stabs me still.
I lost my children to a woman who never learned

to forgive me and, in her twisted love for me,
pretends today that I was never more than a mistake

that made her pregnant and brought her misery.
Oh God! You know what I have suffered!

Buried alive, I moved and spoke, but I was dead!

My children, how I have wept for you four thousand nights,

never daring to think of you and still you live
within my heart like flowers watered by my tears!
What good can come to children while their parents
are at war? Sharon, will you ever forgive me,

if not for us, for them? Lord! I know that you forgive us!
Do you think that we can learn to forgive each other, too?

Unless we learn to forgive our enemies,
all of Humanity is doomed to endless cycles of revenge!

Ghazal W

In all these poems from my heart,
I have disgorged the pain that

has lain like lead within me,
as ballast in a little ship,

plowing through the ocean waves,
to seek your Face, the Pearl of Love.

What does it matter what people say,
when all I seek is You?

What explanations can I give for my deeds,
as I plumb your depths and see nothing but my pettiness?

If I release the ballast will I not capsize and die?
I ask you, "Lord, what do you wish of me?"

"In the world of Man, stay afloat,
But, in my Ocean, drown!"

Ghazal X

It's early morn.
The air is cool and crisp.

A faint moon tries to penetrate
the mist that clouds my heart

while everyone is sleeping.
It is silent.

Listening with my inner ear,
I hear a humming like a giant bee;

As the silence deepens,
it grows louder,

louder, and still louder,
'til, roaring like a hurricane,

it assails my senses with the cry,
"Love Me! Love Me! Love Me!"

My hand shakes writing these words;
Consciousness hurls itself against the pain

to free my heart in bondage!
Like a siren calling, it calls to me:

"Love Me! Love Me! Love Me! Love Me!"
A restlessness overwhelms me,

a half-forgotten yearning pulls
the answer from my breast:

"I do! I do! I do! I do! I do, Lord!

I love Thee shamelessly!"

My love cannot be controlled. Resisting it is Death!
I may win laurels in the world, but lose my soul!

At my final breath, what really matters, but You,
and the exquisite moment of surrender!

Ghazal Y

Reaching deeper into the silence
that men fear as death,

there is a silver ring that
glistens in the light.

Held in my palm, it glows with its
own heat.

Inside, a small inscription reads:
"Fear not! Love well!"

Placing it on my finger, I fall
backwards in a swoon.

Falling, ever falling,
nightmares chase my eyelids;

falling, still yet falling,
sweet music fills my soul;

falling, further falling,
a wondrous light surrounds me;

falling, falling, falling
into a brilliance

greater than a million suns,
all shapes and forms within it

latent with creation.
Still falling I learn

that love is both walking

and falling

never holding, trying
to restrain the falling

into the Nothingness of life
which others fear as Death.

Falling requires trust,
trust requires courage.

Find your ring and wear it
even if it burns!

Ghazal Z

At last my journey's ended,
I see the shore alive with birds and trees;

my children wave their arms to greet me,
friends and family all;

My wife, smiling, waits to fondly hold me
in her embrace once more.

The air, the clouds, the very earth,
vibrates in its joy,

to greet a weary mariner
after a lengthy sail.

But I am heartsick and in pain,
my quest has been a failure.

I searched and searched for you, O Lord,
and all I found was me.

I saw you in the distance, upon another shore,
in the depths, in the stars, burning as the sun;

I heard you in the roaring gales,
the wake that trails my boat,

the phosphorescence of the waves and
in the troubled clouds,

that billow, shred and gallop
across a crystal sky!

O God! Where are you! Where do you abide!

You are so near, yet, I cannot see you!

So close I feel your breath upon my breath,
yet, so distant as your diadem of stars!

Your lips brush my cheek, solace me in sorrow,
scattering my pain like bubbles on the sea!

Blinded by my self-deceit,
I see my shadow instead of you!

I cannot come to you any longer!
My sailing days are over!

Heart and pride broken, weary, worn and beaten,
my faded charts float uselessly towards the shore.

But I beg of you:

Give me one last drop of the wine you promised me
in the days before time's counting!

Come to me, my lover! Come to me, my love!
I wait and languish for your Love! Come and set me free!

Unreachable One, I beg your forgiveness
for aspiring to touch you,

your indulgence for my daring to catch you,
You, who are Infinitely Free!

About the author

I am the son of an aspiring concert pianist and a professional artist. My mother dragged a baby grand Steinway piano every time we moved, which was every few years. I used to sit under it when she would play Beethoven and Chopin, totally immersed in the sound. My father, Bernard Childs, studied at the Art Student's League in New York City. He devoted himself to painting and prints. His work can be found in numerous collections and museums throughout the world.

In 1953, I went to live with him and new bride in Paris, France where I lived between the ages of 12 and 16. In addition to becoming assimilated into the French culture, I was immersed in the world of contemporary art. My father took me to most of the major museums of Europe, and, of course, the Louvre, which lay within walking distance. He taught me to appreciate great art. He introduced me to drawing. He taught me how to see as an artist and to look around me with the eyes of an artist. By the age of sixteen, I was an accomplished artist. I became a professional artist in 1997 and exhibited in art shows, like the Sausalito Arts Festival.

In France, I had a really fine teacher in public school. He encouraged me to write, and even complained to my classmates, saying, "Michel writes better French than you!" He was also a trained classical actor who read the work of Moliere, Racine, Corneille, and Hugo in a big stentorian voice that would rattle the window panes, as well as historian and etymologist. Through him, words became a passion.

It was in Paris, when a Dutch folksinger came to the house and sang the first folk song I ever heard. It was an old English ballad. I bought another guitar and started singing and strumming. Within a couple of years, I was performing. A few years later, and a few thousand miles away, I was in NYC where I ran printing presses, taught guitar, studied composition, accompanied singers, played in bands, at weddings, bars, and wrote and played incidental music for Off-Off Broadway plays.

I discovered Meher Baba in 1969, went to India where I caught fire and found a woman whom I married a few years later. We moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to live adjacent to the Meher Baba Spiritual Center where I ran a printing press for awhile, painted houses, taught

guitar, and opened a custom woodworking shop. It's a trade I continue to practice even now.

After a few years, I developed more and more communication skills, primarily from an exercise I synthesized from various sources that brought about a form of enlightenment. I called it the Integrity Exercise. It also brought about the blending of my heart and my mind which enabled me to write the poetry in this book.

Michael Childs
Sausalito, CA
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