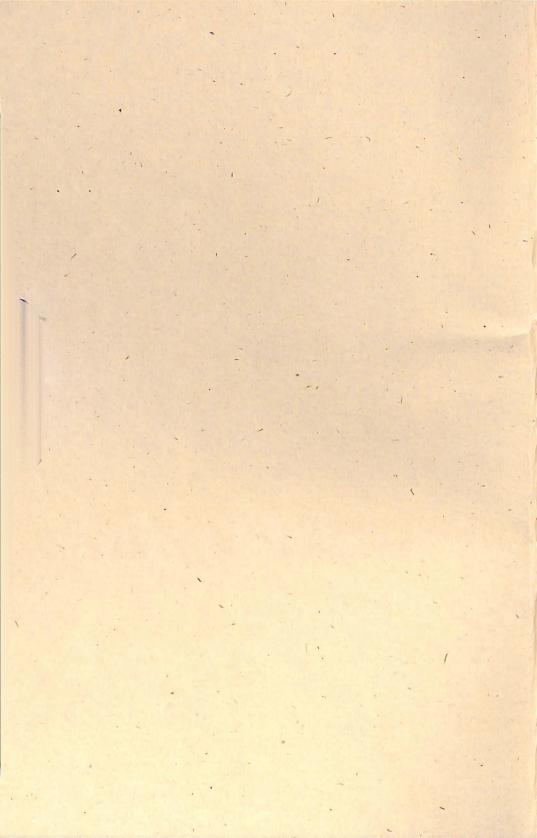
# An Alphabet of Ghazals\*

by

Michael Childs



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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 selfexpression. 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 go hand in hand.

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, the sandalwood tree breaks open releasing its fragrance, on its own accord."

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

Michael Childs 1-31-94 Sausalito, California

### to Selma

without whom this volume would have remained a manuscript

#### 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,

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, laughing 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 again, 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 quiltwork 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,

rintle, rintle, 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 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 reply: "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 will battle 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:

vituperatively destroying 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 them.
Do you, Omniscient One?

"Of course. Does a mother forget her children? I hold them in my 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 see him as he withers in Ward 5,

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 a delicious meal and serve it with a French maid in mesh stockings

to people slowly dying, ebbing, drifting towards an end inexorably closing 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 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 group of friends, I 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? Woman, 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! 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!"
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 is 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

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, as distant as your diadem of stars

that celebrate your glory!
Your lips brush my cheek; they 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!

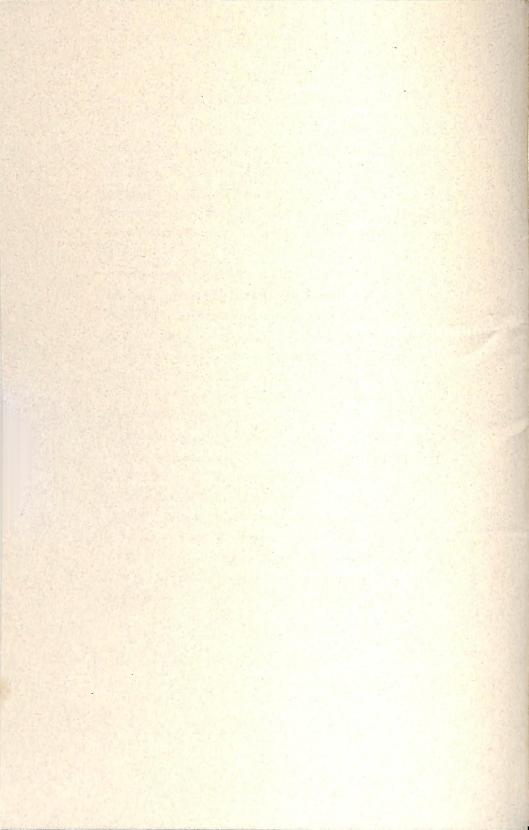
I wait and languish for your Love! Come and set me free!

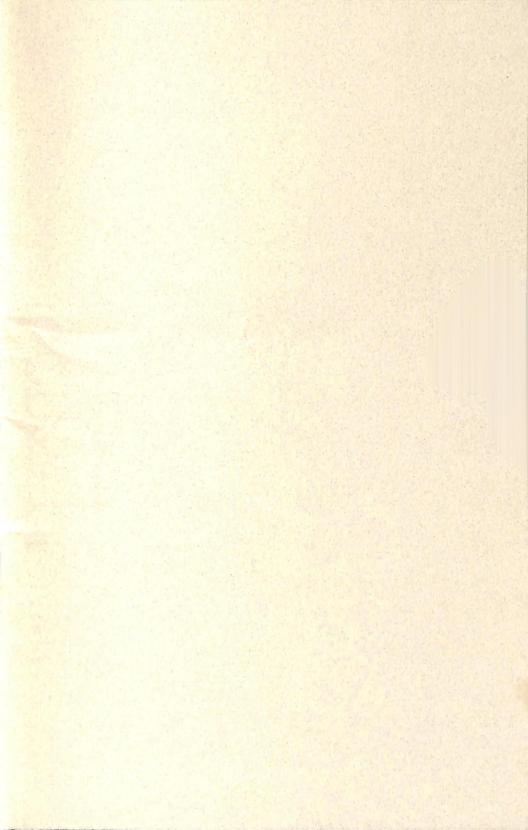
Unreachable One, I beg your forgiveness for aspiring to touch you,

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

#### About the author

Michael Childs is the son of the artist Bernard Childs who taught him craftsmanship, draftsmanship and how to see as a visual artist. His mother was an aspiring concert pianist. He would sit underneath the baby grand while she played Chopin and Beethoven. This inspired him to take up the guitar. He started with folk music and eventually studied composition with Jack Duffy for three years where he learned to read music and write complex musical compositions. He considers himself to be a Classically trained folk musician. In his twenties, he wrote and performed incidental music for a dozen Off, Off Broadway plays, none of which any one would remember and accompanied numberless singers and performers who have all slipped into the obscurity of time. He learned how to play the blues, pop music, Renaissance music, tenor banjo, some rock and roll and the Classical guitar. For ten years, he was a professional fine woodworker, furniture repairman and builder, cabinet maker, woodcarver and antiques restorer. For a dozen years he ran a workshop that he developed from different sources on the nature and the dynamics of true love. In leading these workshops, he learned to speak from his heart, become a wordsmith and blossomed as a writer with this volume of poetry. He is now an aspiring screenwriter. His artwork is on display at the Sausalito Art Center in Sausalito. His children are his treasure and the highest expression of his art.





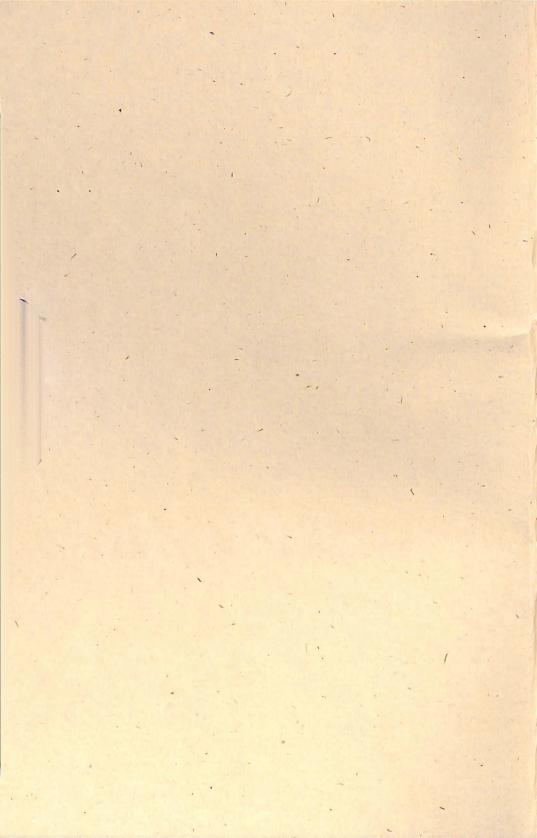




# An Alphabet of Ghazals\*

by

Michael Childs



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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 selfexpression. 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 go hand in hand.

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, the sandalwood tree breaks open releasing its fragrance, on its own accord."

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

Michael Childs 1-31-94 Sausalito, California

### to Selma

without whom this volume would have remained a manuscript

#### 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,

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, laughing 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 again, 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 quiltwork 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,

rintle, rintle, 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 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 reply: "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 will battle 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:

vituperatively destroying 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 them.
Do you, Omniscient One?

"Of course. Does a mother forget her children? I hold them in my 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 see him as he withers in Ward 5,

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 a delicious meal and serve it with a French maid in mesh stockings

to people slowly dying, ebbing, drifting towards an end inexorably closing 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 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 group of friends, I 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? Woman, 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! 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!"
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 is 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, as distant as your diadem of stars

that celebrate your glory!
Your lips brush my cheek; they 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

Michael Childs is the son of the artist Bernard Childs who taught him craftsmanship, draftsmanship and how to see as a visual artist. His mother was an aspiring concert pianist. He would sit underneath the baby grand while she played Chopin and Beethoven. This inspired him to take up the guitar. He started with folk music and eventually studied composition with Jack Duffy for three years where he learned to read music and write complex musical compositions. He considers himself to be a Classically trained folk musician. In his twenties, he wrote and performed incidental music for a dozen Off, Off Broadway plays, none of which any one would remember and accompanied numberless singers and performers who have all slipped into the obscurity of time. He learned how to play the blues, pop music, Renaissance music, tenor banjo, some rock and roll and the Classical guitar. For ten years, he was a professional fine woodworker, furniture repairman and builder, cabinet maker, woodcarver and antiques restorer. For a dozen years he ran a workshop that he developed from different sources on the nature and the dynamics of true love. In leading these workshops, he learned to speak from his heart, become a wordsmith and blossomed as a writer with this volume of poetry. He is now an aspiring screenwriter. His artwork is on display at the Sausalito Art Center in Sausalito. His children are his treasure and the highest expression of his art.

