



by

**Sheikh Muslih-uddin Sa'di Shirazi (1258)**

**Translated by**

**Sir Edwin Arnold (1899)**



**World Famous Persian Poet of 13th Century**



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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

## *Introduction*

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

Whose hand and tongue is capable

To fulfill the obligations of thanks to Him?

Words of the Most High:

**(Quran 34:13) اَعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشُّكُورُ**

**Be thankful, O family of David, and but few of my servants are thankful.**

**It is best to a worshipper for his transgressions**

**To offer apologies at the throne of God,**

**Although what is worthy of his dignity**

**No one is able to accomplish.**

The showers of his boundless mercy have penetrated to every spot, and the banquet of his unstinted liberality is spread out everywhere. He tears not the veil of reputation of his worshippers even for grievous sins, and does not withhold their daily allowance of bread for great crimes.

**O bountiful One, who from thy invisible treasury**

**Suppliest the Guebre (Fire-worshiper) and the Christian with food,**

**How could'st Thou disappoint Thy friends,**

**Whilst having regard for Thy enemies?**

He told the chamberlain of the morning breeze to spread out the emerald carpet and, having commanded the nurse of vernal clouds to cherish the daughters of plants in the cradle of the earth, the trees donned the new year's robe and clothed their breast with the garment of green foliage, whilst their offspring, the branches, adorned their heads with blossoms at the approach of the season of

the roses. Also the juice of the cane became delicious honey by his power and the date a lofty tree by his care.

Cloud and wind, moon and sun move in the sky  
That thou mayest gain bread, and not eat it unconcerned.  
For thee all are revolving and obedient.  
It is against the requirements of justice if thou obeyest not.

There is a tradition of the prince of created beings, the paragon of existing things, the mercy to the inhabitants of the world, the purest of mankind and the completion of the revolving ages, Muhammad the elect, upon whom be blessing and peace:

Intercessor, obeyed, prophet, gracious,  
Bountiful, majestic, affable, marked with the seal of God.

What danger is there to the wall of the faithful with thee for a buttress?  
What fear of the waves of the sea has he whose pilot is Noah?

He attained exaltation by his perfection.  
He dispelled darkness by his beauty.  
Beauteous are all his qualities,  
Benediction be on him and on his family.

The tradition is that: whenever a sinful and distressed worshipper stretches forth the hand of repentance with hopes of acceptance to the court of heaven, Allah the Most High does not notice him, whereon he continues to implore mercy with supplications and tears and Allah the Most Holy says:

O my angels, verily I am ashamed of my servant and he has no other  
lord besides myself. Accordingly I have fully pardoned him.

See the generosity and kindness of Allah.  
The servant has committed sin and He is ashamed.

Those who attend permanently at the temple of his glory confess the imperfection of their worship and say:

We have not worshipped thee according to the requirements of thy  
worship;

and those who describe the splendor of his beauty are rapt in amazement saying:

We have not known thee as thou oughtest to be known.

If someone asks me for His description,  
What shall I despairing say of One who has no form?  
The lovers have been slain by the beloved.  
No voice can come from the slain.

One of the devout who had deeply plunged his head into the cowl of meditation and had been immersed in the ocean of visions, was asked, when he had come out of that state, by one of his companions who had desired to cheer him up: 'What beautiful gift hast thou brought us from the garden in which thou hast been?'

He replied:

'I intended to fill the skirts of my robe with roses, when I reached the rose-tree, as presents for my friends but the perfume of the flowers intoxicated me so much that I let, go the hold of my skirts.'

O bird of the morning, learn love from the moth  
Because it burnt, lost its life, and found no voice.  
These pretenders are ignorantly in search of Him,  
Because he who obtained knowledge has not returned.

O thou who art above all imaginations, conjectures, opinions and ideas,  
Above anything people have said or we have heard or read,  
The assembly is finished and life has reached its term  
And we have, as at first, remained powerless in describing thee.



## Panegyric of the Padshah of Islam

(may Allah perpetuate his reign)

The good reputation of Sa'di which is current among the people, the renown of his eloquence which has spread on the surface of the earth, the products of his friendly pen which are consumed like sugar, and the scraps of his literary

compositions which are hawked about like bills of exchange, cannot be ascribed to his virtue and perfection, but the lord of the world, the axis of the revolving circle of time, the vice-gerent of Solomon, protector of the followers of the religion, His Majesty the Shahanshah Atabek Aa'zm Muzaffaruddin Abu Bekr Ben Sa'd Ben Zanki- The shadow of Allah on earth!

O Lord, be pleased with him and with his kingdom-has looked upon Sa'di with a favorable eye, has praised him greatly, and has shown him sincere affection so that all men, gentle and simple, love him because the people follow the religion of their king.

Because thou lookest upon my humble person,  
My merits are more celebrated than those of the sun.

Although this slave may possess all faults,  
Every fault pleasing the Sultan becomes a virtue.

A sweet-smelling piece of clay, one day in the bath,  
Came from the hand of a beloved one to my hand.

I asked: 'Art thou musk or ambergris?

Because thy delicious odor intoxicates me.'

It replied: 'I was a despicable lump of clay;

But for a while in the society of a rose.

The perfection of my companion took effect on me

And, if not, I am the same earth which I am.'

O Allah, favor the Muslims with the prolongation of his life, and with an augmentation of his reward for his good qualities and deeds; exalt the dignities of his friends and governors; annihilate those who are inimical to him and wish him ill; for the sake of what is recorded in the verses of the Quran. O Allah, give security protect his son.

Verily the world is happy through him; may his happiness endure for ever

And may the Lord strengthen him and with the banners of victory.

Thus the branch will flourish of which he is the root

Because the beauty of the earth's plants depends on the virtue of the seed.

May God, whose name be exalted and hallowed, keep in security and peace the pure country of Shiraz until the time of the resurrection, under the authority of righteous governors and by the exertions of practical scholars.

Knowest thou not why I in foreign countries  
Roamed about for a long time?  
I went away from the distress of the Turks because I saw  
The world entangled like the hair of negroes;  
They were all human beings, but  
Like wolves sharp-clawed, for shedding blood.  
When I returned I saw the country at rest,  
The tigers having abandoned the nature of tigers.  
Within a man of good disposition like an angel,  
Without an army like bellicose lions.  
Thus it happened that first I beheld  
The world full of confusion, anxiety and distress;  
Then it became as it is in the days of the just Sultan  
Atabek Abu Bekr Ben Sa'd Zanki.

The country of Pares dreads not the vicissitudes of time,  
As long as one presides over it like thee, the shadow of God.  
Today no one can point out on the surface of the earth,  
A place like the threshold of thy door, the asylum of comfort.  
On thee is incumbent the protection of the distressed and gratitude  
Upon us and reward on God the creator of the world,  
As long as the world and wind endure.



### **The Cause for Composing the Gulistan**

I was one night meditating on the time which had elapsed, repenting of the life I had squandered and perforating the stony mansion of my heart with adamantine tears. I uttered the following verses in conformity with the state of mind:

Every moment a breath of life is spent,  
If I consider, not much of it remains.  
O thou, whose fifty years have elapsed in sleep,  
Wilt thou perhaps overtake them in these five days?  
Shame on him who has gone and done no work.  
The drum of departure was beaten but he has not made his load.

Sweet sleep on the morning of departure  
Retains the pedestrian from the road.  
Whoever had come had built a new edifice.  
He departed and left the place to another  
And that other one concocted the same futile schemes  
And this edifice was not completed by anyone.

Cherish not an inconstant friend.  
Such a traitor is not fit for amity.  
As all the good and bad must surely die,  
He is happy who carries off the ball of virtue.

Send provision for thy journey to thy tomb.  
Nobody will bring it after thee; send it before.

Life is snow, the sun is melting hot.  
Little remains, but the gentleman is slothful still.  
O thou who hast gone empty handed to the bazaar,  
I fear thou wilt not bring a towel filled.  
Who eats the corn he has sown while it is yet green,  
Must at harvest time glean the ears of it.  
Listen with all thy heart to the advice of Sa'di.  
Such is the way; be a man and travel on.

The capital of man's life is his abdomen.  
If it be gradually emptied there is no fear  
But if it be so closed as not to open  
The heart may well despair of life;  
And if it be open so that it cannot be closed,  
Go and wash thy hands of this world's life.

Four contending rebellious dispositions  
Harmonize but five days with each other.  
If one of these four becomes prevalent,  
Sweet life must abandon the body  
Wherefore an intelligent and perfect man  
Sets not his heart upon this world's life.

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

To sit in a corner, like one with a cut tongue, deaf and dumb,  
Is better than a man who has no command over his tongue.

I continued in this resolution till a friend, who had been my companion in the camel-litter of misery and my comrade in the closet of affection, entered at the door, according to his old custom with playful gladness, and spread out the surface of desire; but I would give him no reply nor lift up my head from the knees of worship. He looked at me aggrieved and said:

'Now, while thou hast the power of utterance,  
Speak, O brother, with grace and kindness  
Because tomorrow, when the messenger of death arrives,  
Thou wilt of necessity restrain thy tongue.'

One of my connections informed him how matters stood and told him that I had firmly determined and was intent upon spending the rest of my life in continual devotion and silence, advising him at the same time, in case he should be able, to follow my example and to keep me company.

He replied:

'I swear by the great dignity of Allah and by our old friendship that I shall not draw breath, nor budge one step, unless he converses with me as formerly, and in his usual way; because it is foolish to insult friends and easy to expiate an oath. It is against propriety, and contrary to the opinions of wise men that the Zulfiqar (sword) of Ali should remain in the scabbard and the tongue of Sa'di in his palate.'



O intelligent man what is the tongue in the mouth?  
It is the key to the treasure-door of a virtuous man.  
When the door is closed how can one know  
Whether he is a seller of jewels or a hawker?  
Although intelligent men consider silence civil,  
It is better for thee to speak at the proper time.  
Two things betoken levity of intellect: to remain mute  
When it is proper to speak and to talk when silence is required.

In short, I had not the firmness to restrain my tongue from speaking to him, and did not consider it polite to turn away my face from his conversation, he being a congenial friend and sincerely affectionate.

When thou fightest with anyone, consider  
Whether thou wilt have to flee from him or he from thee.

I was under the necessity of speaking and then went out by way of diversion in the vernal season, when the traces of severe cold had disappeared and the time of the dominion of roses had arrived:

Green garments were upon the trees  
Like holiday robes on contented persons.  
On the first of the month Ardibihešt Jellali  
The bulbuls were singing on the pulpits of branches.  
Upon the roses pearls of dew had fallen,  
Resembling perspiration on an angry sweetheart's cheek.

I happened to spend the night in a garden with one of my friends and we found it to be a pleasant cheerful place with heart-ravishing entangled trees; its ground seemed to be paved with small glass beads whilst, from its vines, bunches like the Pleiades were suspended.

A garden the water of whose river was limpid  
A grove the melody of whose birds was harmonious.  
The former full of bright-colored tulips,  
The latter full of fruits of various kinds;  
The wind had in the shade of its trees  
Spread out a bed of all kinds of flowers.

The next morning when the intention of returning had prevailed over the opinion of tarrying, I saw that my friend had in his skirt collected roses, sweet basil, hyacinths and fragrant herbs with the determination to carry them to town; whereon I said:

'Thou knowest that the roses of the garden are perishable and the season passes away',

and philosophers have said:

'Whatever is not of long duration is not to be cherished.'

He asked: 'Then what is to be done?'

I replied: 'I may compose for the amusement of those who look and for the instruction of those who are present a book of a Rose Garden, a Gulistan, whose leaves cannot be touched by the tyranny of autumnal blasts and the delight of whose spring the vicissitudes of time will be unable to change into the inconstancy of autumn.'

Of what use will be a dish of roses to thee?

Take a leaf from my rose-garden.

A flower endures but five or six days

But this rose-garden is always delightful.

After I had uttered these words he threw away the flowers from his skirts, and attached himself to mine, saying:

'When a generous fellow makes a promise he keeps it.'

On the same day I happened to write two chapters, namely on polite society and the rules of conversation, in a style acceptable to orators and instructive to letter-writers.

In short, some roses of the garden still remained when the book of the Rose-garden was finished but it will in reality be completed only after approbation in the court of the Shah, who is the refuge of the world, the shadow of God, the ray of his grace, the treasury of the age, the asylum of the Faith, strengthened by heaven, aided against enemies, the arm of the victorious government, the lamp of the resplendent religion, the beauty of mankind, the boast of Islam, Sa'd son of Atabek the great, the majestic Shahanshah, owner of the necks of

nations, lord of the kings of Arabia and Persia, the sultan of the land and the sea, the heir of the kingdom of Solomon, Muzaffaruddin Ibu Bekr, son of Sa'd Zanki, may Allah the most high perpetuate the prosperity of them both and direct their inclinations to every good thing.

Perused with a kind glance,  
Adorned with approbation by the sovereign,  
It will be a Chinese picture-gallery or design of the Arzank,  
Hopes are entertained that he will not be wearied  
By these contents because a Pose-garden is not a place of displeasure.  
The more so as its august preface is dedicated  
To Sa'd Abu Bekr Sa'd the son of Zanki.



### **Record of the Great Amir Fakhruddin Ben Abu Bekr, Son of Abu Nassar**

Again, the bride of imagination can for want of beauty not lift up her head nor raise her eyes from the feet of bashfulness to appear in the assembly of persons endowed with pulchritude, unless adorned with the ornaments of approbation from the great Amir, who is learned, just, aided by heaven, victorious, supporter of the throne of the Sultanate and councilor in deliberations of the realm, refuge of the poor, asylum of strangers, patron of learned men, lover of the pious, glory of the dynasty of Pares, right hand of the kingdom, chief of the nobles, boast of the monarchy and of the religion, succor of Islam and of the Muslims, buttress of kings and sultans, Abu Bekr, son of Abu Nassar, may Allah prolong his life, augment his dignity, enlighten his breast and increase his reward twofold, because he enjoys the praise of all great men and is the embodiment of every laudable quality.

Whoever reposes in the shadow of his favor,  
His sin is transmuted to obedience and his foe into a friend.

Every attendant and follower has an appointed duty and if, in the performance thereof, he gives way to remissness and indolence, he is certainly called to account and becomes subject to reproaches, except the tribe of dervishes, from whom thanks are due for the benefits they receive from great men as well as praises and prayers, all of which duties are more suitably performed in their absence than in their presence, because in the latter they look like ostentation and in the former they are free from ceremony.

The back of the bent sky became flat with joy,  
When dame nature brought forth a child like thee.

It is an instance of wisdom if the Creator  
Causes a servant to make the general welfare his special duty.

He has found eternal happiness who lived a good life,  
Because, after his end, good repute will keep his name alive.

No matter whether virtuous men praise you or not  
A lovely maid stands in no need of a tire woman.



### **Excuse for Remissness in Service and Cause for Preferring Solitude**

My negligence and backwardness in diligent attendance at the royal court resemble the case of Barzachumihr, whose merits the sages of India were discussing but could at last not reproach him with anything except slowness of speech because he delayed long and his hearers were obliged to wait till he delivered himself of what he had to say. When Barzachumihr heard of this he said:

'It is better for me to consider what to speak than to repent of what I have spoken.'

A trained orator, old, aged,  
First meditates and then speaks.  
Do not speak without consideration.  
Speak well and if slow what matters it?  
Deliberate and then begin to talk.  
Say thyself enough before others say enough.  
By speech a man is better than a brute  
But a beast is better unless thou speakest properly.

How then could I venture to appear in the sight of the grandees of my lord, may his victory be glorious, who are an assembly of pious men and the centre of profound scholars? If I were to be led in the ardor of conversation to speak petulantly, I could produce only a trifling stock-in-trade in the noble presence but:

glass beads are not worth a barleycorn in the bazaar of jewelers, a lamp does not shine in the presence of the sun, and a minaret looks low at the foot of Mount Alvend.

Who lifts up his neck with pretensions,  
Foes hasten to him from every side.  
Sa'di has fallen to be a hermit.  
No one came to attack a fallen man.  
First deliberation, then speech;  
The foundation was laid first, then the wall.

I know bouquet-binding but not in the garden. I sell a sweetheart but not in Canaan. Luqman the philosopher, being asked from whom he had learnt wisdom, replied:

'From the blind, who do not take a step before trying the place.'

First move about, then stir out.

Try thy virility first, then marry.  
Though a cock may be brave in war  
He strikes his claws in vain on a brazen falcon.  
A cat is a lion in catching mice  
But a mouse in combat with a tiger.

But, trusting in the liberal sentiments of the great, who shut their eyes to the faults of their inferiors and abstain from divulging the crimes of humble men, we have in this book recorded, by way of abridgment, some rare events, stories, poetry and accounts about ancient kings, spending a portion of our precious life in the task. This was the reason for composing the book Gulistan; and help is from Allah.

This well-arranged composition will remain for years,  
When every atom of our dust is dispersed.

The intention of this design was that it should survive  
Because I perceive no stability in my existence,  
Unless one day a pious man compassionately  
Utters a prayer for the works of dervishes.

The author, having deliberated upon the arrangement of the book, and the adornment of the chapters, deemed it suitable to curtail the diction of this beautiful garden and luxuriant grove and to make it resemble paradise, which also has eight entrances. The abridgment was made to avoid tediousness.

1. The Manners of Kings
2. On the Morals of Dervishes
3. On the Excellence of Content
4. On the Advantages of Silence
5. On Love and Youth
6. On Weakness and Old Age
7. On the Effects of Education
8. On Rules for Conduct in Life

At a period when our time was pleasant  
The Hijrat was six hundred and fifty-six.  
Our intention was advice and we gave it.  
We recommended thee to God and departed.