

## My Favorite Hafiz

Selections from *I Heard God Laughing*, *Tonight the Subject is Love*, and *The Gift*, translated by Daniel Ladinsky, selected by Jason Espada.

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## From 'I Heard God Laughing'

### Introduction

Shams-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz (c. 1320-1389), though little known in the Western world, is the most beloved poet of Persia (Iran). To Persians, the poems of Hafiz are not "classical literature" from a remote past, but cherished wisdom from a dear and intimate friend. The special gift of this friend is a poetry unique in world literature, a poetry that celebrates every expression of love in the universe.

The lyrics of Hafiz overflow with a profound appreciation of the beauty and richness of life when seen through the eyes of love. With unerring insight, he explores the feelings and motives associated with every level of love, tracing each nuance of emotion in depth and detail. His poetry outlines the stages of the mystic's "path of love" that journey of inner unfolding in which love dissolves personal boundaries and limitations to join larger processes of growth and transformation. Through these processes, human love becomes divine love and the lover merges ultimately with the source and goal of all love, which Hafiz calls the Divine Beloved.

*You Are with the Friend Now*

Hafiz describes some of the preparations required for the inner "Journey of Love." He urges us to let go of habitual negative attitudes and unnecessary attachments, which only weigh us down. To make this Journey, we must be light, happy and free to go Dancing!

*'I wish I could show you, When you are lonely or in darkness,  
The Astonishing Light Of your own Being"*

*And Applaud*

Once a young man came to me and said,

"Dear Master,  
I am feeling strong and brave today, And I would like to know the truth  
About all of my-attachments."

And I replied,

"Attachments?  
Attachments!"

Sweet Heart,  
Do you really want me to speak to you  
About all your attachments,

When I can see so clearly  
You have built, with so much care,  
Such a great brothel  
To house all of your pleasures.

You have even surrounded the whole damn place  
With armed guards and vicious dogs  
To protect your desires

So that you can sneak away  
From time to time  
And try to squeeze light  
Into your parched being  
From a source as fruitful  
As a dried date pit  
That even a bird  
Is wise enough to spit out.

Your attachments! My dear,  
Let's not speak of those,

For Hafiz understands the sufferings  
Of your heart.

Hafiz knows  
The torments and the agonies  
That every mind on the way to Annihilation in the Sun  
Must endure.

So at night in my prayers I often stop  
And ask a thousand angels to join in  
And Applaud,

And Applaud  
Anything,  
Anything in this world  
That can bring your heart comfort!"

*Cast All Your Votes for Dancing*

I know the voice of depression  
Still calls to you.

I know those habits that can ruin your life  
Still send their invitations .

But you are with the Friend now  
And look so much stronger.

You can stay that way  
And even bloom!

Keep squeezing drops of the Sun  
From your prayers and work and music  
And from your companions' beautiful laughter.

Keep squeezing drops of the Sun  
From the sacred hands and glance of your Beloved  
And, my dear,  
From the most insignificant movements  
Of your own holy body.

Learn to recognize the counterfeit coins  
That may buy you just a moment of pleasure,  
But then drag you for days  
Like a broken man  
Behind a farting camel.

You are with the Friend now.  
Learn what actions of yours delight Him,  
What actions of yours bring freedom  
And Love.

Whenever you say God's name, dear pilgrim,  
My ears wish my head was missing  
So they could finally kiss each other  
And applaud all your nourishing wisdom!

O keep squeezing drops of the Sun  
From your prayers and work and music  
And from your companions' beautiful laughter

And from the most insignificant movements  
Of your own holy body.

Now, sweet one,  
Be wise.  
Cast all your votes for Dancing!

*The Jeweler*

If a naive and desperate man  
Brings a precious stone  
To the only jeweler in town,  
Wanting to sell it,

The jeweler's eyes  
Will begin to play a game,  
Like most eyes in the world when they look at you.

The jeweler's face will stay calm.  
He will not want to reveal the stone's true value,  
But to hold the man captive to fear and greed  
While he calculates  
The value of the transaction.

But one moment with me, my dear,  
Will show you  
That there is nothing,  
Nothing  
Hafiz wants from you.

When you sit before a Master like me,  
Even if you are a drooling mess,  
My eyes sing with Excitement

They see your Divine Worth.

*Saints Bowing in the Mountains*

Do you know how beautiful you are?

I think not, my dear.

For as you talk of God,  
I see great parades with wildly colorful bands  
Streaming from your mind and heart,  
Carrying wonderful and secret messages  
To every corner of this world.

I see saints bowing in the mountains  
Hundreds of miles away  
To the wonder of sounds  
That break into light  
From your most common words.

Speak to me of your mother,  
Your cousins and your friends.

Tell me of squirrels and birds you know.  
Awaken your legion of nightingales -  
Let them soar wild and free in the sky

And begin to sing to God.  
Let's all begin to sing to God!

Do you know how beautiful you are?

I think not, my dear,

Yet Hafiz  
Could set you upon a Stage  
And worship you forever!

*Zero*

Zero  
Is where the Real Fun starts.

There's too much counting  
Everywhere else!

*If It Is Not Too Dark*

Go for a walk, if it is not too dark.  
Get some fresh air, try to smile.  
Say something kind  
To a safe-looking stranger, if one happens by.

Always exercise your heart's knowing.

You might as well attempt something real  
Along this path:

Take your spouse or lover into your arms  
The way you did when you first met.  
Let tenderness pour from your eyes  
The way the Sun gazes warmly on the earth.

Play a game with some children.  
Extend yourself to a friend.  
Sing a few ribald songs to your pets and plants –  
Why not let them get drunk and wild!

Let's toast  
Every rung we've climbed on Evolution's ladder.  
Whisper, "I love you! I love you!"  
To the whole mad world.

Let's stop reading about God -  
We will never understand Him.

Jump to your feet, wave your fists,  
Threaten and warn the whole Universe

That your heart can no longer live  
Without real love!

*Awake Awhile*

Awake awhile.

It does not have to be  
Forever,  
Right now.

One step upon the Sky's soft skirt  
Would be enough.

Hafiz,  
Awake awhile.  
Just one True moment of Love  
Will last for days.

Rest all your elaborate plans and tactics  
For Knowing Him,  
For they are all just frozen spring buds  
Far,  
So far from Summer's Divine Gold.

Awake, my dear.  
Be kind to your sleeping heart.  
Take it out into the vast fields of Light  
And let it breathe.

Say,  
"Love,  
Give me back my wings.  
Lift me,  
Lift me nearer."

Say to the sun and moon,  
Say to our dear Friend,

"I will take You up now, Beloved,  
On that wonderful Dance You promised!"

*I Know the Way You Can Get*

I know the way you can get  
When you have not had a drink of Love:

Your face hardens,  
Your sweet muscles cramp.  
Children become concerned  
About a strange look that appears in your eyes  
Which even begins to worry your own mirror  
And nose.

Squirrels and birds sense your sadness  
And call an important conference in a tall tree.  
They decide which secret code to chant  
To help your mind and soul.

Even angels fear that brand of madness  
That arrays itself against the world  
And throws sharp stones and spears into  
The innocent  
And into one's self

O I know the way you can get  
If you have not been out drinking Love:

You might rip apart  
Every sentence your friends and teachers say,  
Looking for hidden clauses.

You might weigh every word on a scale  
Like a dead fish.

You might pull out a ruler to measure  
From every angle in your darkness  
The beautiful dimensions of a heart you once  
Trusted.

I know the way you can get  
If you have not had a drink from Love's  
Hands.

That is why all the Great Ones speak of  
The vital need  
To keep Remembering God,  
So you will come to know and see Him  
As being so Playful  
And Wanting,  
Just Wanting to help.

That is why Hafiz says:  
Bring your cup near me,  
For I am a Sweet Old Vagabond  
With an Infinite Leaking Barrel  
Of Light and Laughter and Truth  
That the Beloved has tied to my back.

Dear one,  
Indeed, please bring your heart near me.  
For all I care about  
Is quenching your thirst for freedom!

All a Sane man can ever care about  
Is giving Love!

*The Only Sin I Know*

If someone sits with me  
And we talk about the Beloved,

If I cannot give his heart comfort,  
If I cannot make him feel better  
About himself and this world,

Then, Hafiz,  
Quickly run to the mosque and pray -

For you have just committed  
The only sin I know.

*Laughter*

What is laughter? What is laughter?  
 It is God waking up! O it is God waking up!  
 It is the sun poking its sweet head out  
 From behind a cloud  
 You have been carrying too long,  
 Veiling your eyes and heart.

It is Light breaking ground for a great Structure  
 That is your Real body- called Truth.

It is happiness applauding itself and then taking flight  
 To embrace everyone and everything in this world.

Laughter is the polestar  
 Held in the sky by our Beloved,  
 Who eternally says,

"Yes, dear ones, come this way,  
 Come this way toward Me and Love!

Come with your tender mouths moving  
 And your beautiful tongues conducting songs  
 And with your movements - your magic movements  
 Of hands and feet and glands and cells - Dancing!

Know that to God's Eye,  
 All movement is a Wondrous Language,  
 And Music - such exquisite, wild Music!"

O what is laughter, Hafiz?  
 What is this precious love and laughter  
 Budding in our hearts?

It is the glorious sound  
 Of a soul waking up!

From 'Tonight the Subject is Love'

At this Party

I don't want to be the only one here  
Telling all the secrets -

Filling up all the bowls at this party,  
Taking all the laughs.

I would like you  
To start putting things on the table  
That can also feed the soul  
The way I do.

That way We can invite  
A hell of a lot more  
Friends.

No Other Kind of Light

Find that flame, that love,

That Wonderful Man

Who can bum beneath the water.

No other kind of light

Will cook the food you

Need.

## Not With Wings

Here soar  
Not with wings

But with your moving hands and feet  
And sweating brows –

Standing by your Beloved's side  
Reaching out to comfort this world

With your cup of solace  
Drawn from your vast reservoir of Truth.

Here soar  
Not with your eyes and senses  
That turn their backs  
On the earth's sweet stumbling dance  
Which needs you.

Here love, O here love,  
With your mouth tender and open upon your lover,

And with your heart on duty  
To the souls of rivers, children, forest animals,  
All the shy feathered ones and laughing, jumping,  
Shining fish.

O here, pilgrim,  
Love  
On this holy battleground of life

Where there are bleeding men  
Who are calling for a sacred drink,

A gentle word or touch from man  
Or God.

Hafiz! why just serve and play with angels?  
They are already content.

Brew your knowledge well for men  
With aching minds and guts!

And for those wayfarers who have gained  
The rare courageous thirsts  
That can never be relinquished  
Until Union!

Hafiz!  
Leave your recipes in golden drums.

Tie those barrels to the backs of camels  
Who will keep circumambulating the worlds,

Giving nourishment  
To all our tender wondrous spheres.

O here love, O love right here.  
Find your happiness, dear wayfarer,

With your beautiful lips and body  
So sweetly opened,

Yielding their vital gifts upon  
This magnificent  
Earth.

## Venus Just Asked Me

Perhaps  
For just one minute out of the day,

It may be of value to torture yourself  
With thoughts like,

“I should be doing  
A hell of a lot more with my life than I am -  
Cause I’m so damn talented.”

But remember,  
For just one minute out of the day.

With all the rest of your time,  
It would be best  
To try  
Looking upon your self more as God does.

For He knows  
Your true royal nature.

God is never confused  
And can see Only Himself in you.

My dear,  
Venus just leaned down and asked me  
To tell you a secret, to confess  
She’s just a mirror who has been stealing  
Your light and music for centuries.

She knows as does Hafiz,  
You are the sole heir to  
The King.

## Ten Thousand Idiots

It is always a danger  
To the aspirant  
On the  
Path

When one begins  
To believe and  
Act

As if the ten thousand idiots  
Who so long ruled  
And lived  
Inside

Have all packed their bags  
And skipped town  
Or  
Died .

From 'The Gift'

My spring eyes still warm faces, and awake verdant earths in your soul.

A Poet

A Poet is someone  
Who can pour light into a cup,  
Then raise it to nourish  
Your beautiful parched, holy mouth.

## LOOKING FOR GOOD FISH

Why complain about life  
 If you are looking for good fish  
 And have followed some idiot  
 Into the middle of the copper market?

Why go crazy  
 If you are looking for fine silk  
 And you keep rubbing your hands against  
 Burlap and hemp sacks?

If your heart really needs to touch a face  
 That is filled with abundance  
 Then why didn't you come to this  
 Old Man sooner?

For my cheek is the universe's cloister  
 And if you can make your prayers sweet enough  
 Tonight

Then Hafiz will lean over and offer you  
 All the warmth in my body  
 In case God is busy  
 Doing something else  
 Somewhere.

Why complain if you are looking  
 To quench your spirit's longing  
 And have followed a rat into a desert.

If your soul really needs to touch a face  
 That is always filled with compassion

And tenderness  
 Then why,

Why my dear  
 Did you not come to your friend Hafiz  
 Sooner?

WE HAVE NOT COME TO  
TAKE PRISONERS

We have not come here to take prisoners,  
But to surrender ever more deeply  
To freedom and joy.

We have not come into this exquisite world  
To hold ourselves hostage from love.

Run my dear,  
From anything  
That may not strengthen  
Your precious budding wings.

Run like hell my dear,  
From anyone likely  
To put a sharp knife  
Into the sacred, tender vision  
Of your beautiful heart.

We have a duty to befriend  
Those aspects of obedience  
That stand outside of our house  
And shout to our reason  
"O please, O please,  
Come out and play."

For we have not come here to take prisoners  
Or to confine our wondrous spirits,

But to experience ever and ever more deeply  
Our divine courage, freedom, and  
Light!

## I RAIN

I rain  
Because your meadows call  
For God.

I weave light into words so that  
When your mind holds them

Your eyes will relinquish their sadness,  
Turn bright, a little brighter, giving to us  
The way a candle does  
To the dark.

I have wrapped my laughter like a birthday gift  
And left it beside your bed.

I have planted the wisdom in my heart  
Next to every signpost in the sky.

A wealthy man  
Often becomes eccentric,

A divine crazed soul  
Is transformed into infinite generosity

Tying gold sacks of gratuity  
To the dangling feet of moons, planets, ecstatic  
Midair dervishes, and singing birds.

I speak  
Because every cell in your body  
Is reaching out  
For God.

## GOD JUST CAME NEAR

No

One

In need of love

Can sit with my verse for

An hour

And then walk away without carrying

Golden tools,

And feeling that God

Just came

Near.

## THE SUN NEVER SAYS

Even  
After  
All this time  
The sun never says to the earth,

“You owe  
Me.”

Look  
What happens  
With a love like that,  
It lights the  
Whole  
Sky.

## WHY JUST ASK THE DONKEY

Why  
 Just ask the donkey in me  
 To speak to the donkey in you,

When I have so many other beautiful animals  
 And brilliant colored birds inside  
 That are all longing to say something wonderful  
 And exciting to your heart?

Let's open all the locked doors upon our eyes  
 That keep us from knowing the Intelligence  
 That begets love  
 And a more lively and satisfying conversation  
 With the Friend.

Let's turn loose our golden falcons  
 So that they can meet in the sky  
 Where our spirits belong -  
 Necking like two  
 Hot kids.

Let's hold hands and get drunk near the sun  
 And sing sweet songs to God  
 Until He joins us with a few notes  
 From His own sublime lute and drum.

If you have a better idea  
 Of how to pass a lonely night  
 After your glands may have performed  
 All their little magic

Then speak up sweethearts, speak up,  
 For Hafiz and all the world will listen.

Why just bring your donkey to me  
 Asking for stale hay

And a boring conference with the idiot

In regards to this precious matter –  
Such a precious matter as love,

When I have so many other divine animals  
And brilliant colored birds inside  
That are all longing  
To so sweetly  
Greet  
You!

You carry all the ingredients  
To turn your existence into joy,

Mix them, mix  
Them!

## CURFEWS

Noise  
Is a cruel ruler

Who is always imposing  
Curfews,

While  
Stillness and quiet  
Break open the vintage  
Bottles,

Awake the real  
Band.

Art is the conversation between lovers.  
Art offers an opening for the heart.  
True art makes the divine silence in the soul  
Break into applause.

Art is, at last, the knowledge of  
Where we are standing –  
Where we are standing  
In this Wonderland  
When we rip off all our clothes  
And this blind man's patch, veil,  
That got tied across our brow.

Art is the conversation between lovers.

True art awakes the  
Extraordinary  
Ovation.

## THE VINTAGE MAN

The  
Difference  
Between a good artist  
And a great one

Is:

The novice  
Will often lay down his tool  
Or brush

Then pick up an invisible club  
On the mind's table

And helplessly smash the easels and  
Jade.

Whereas the vintage man  
No longer hurts himself or anyone

And keeps on Sculpting

Light.

## JUST LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

I once had a student  
Who would sit alone in his house at night  
Shivering with worries  
And fears,

And, come morning,  
He would often look as though  
He had been raped  
By a ghost.

Then one day my pity

Crafted for him a knife  
From my own divine sword.

Since then,  
I have become very proud  
Of this student.

For now, come night,  
Not only has he lost all his fear,

Now he goes out

Just looking for  
Trouble.

## The Gift

Our  
Union is like this:

You feel cold  
So I reach for a blanket to cover  
Our shivering feet.

A hunger comes into your body  
So I run to my garden  
And start digging potatoes.

You ask for a few words of comfort and guidance,  
I quickly kneel at your side offering you  
This whole book-  
As a gift.

You ache with loneliness one night  
So much you weep

And I say,

Here's a rope,  
Tie it around me,

Hafiz  
Will be your companion  
For life.

## THE SCENT OF LIGHT

Like a great starving beast

My body is quivering

Fixed

On the scent

Of

Light.

## THE STAIRWAY OF EXISTENCE

We  
Are not  
In pursuit of formalities  
Or fake religious Laws,

For through the stairway of existence  
We have come to God's  
Door.

We are  
People who need to love, because  
Love is the soul's life,

Love is simply creation's greatest joy.

Through  
The stairway of existence,  
O, through the stairway of existence, Hafiz,

Have  
You now come,  
Have we all now come to  
The Beloved's  
Door.

Behind the veil Hafiz and angels sometimes weep

Because most eyes are rarely glad  
And your divine beauty is still too frightened  
To unfurl its thousand swaying arms.

## STOP BEING SO RELIGIOUS

What  
Do sad people have in  
Common?

It seems  
They have all built a shrine  
To the past

And often go there  
And do a strange wail and  
Worship.

What is the beginning of  
Happiness?

It is to stop being  
So religious

Like

That.

## IT FELT LOVE

How  
Did the rose  
Ever open its heart

And give to this world  
All its  
Beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light  
Against its  
Being,

Otherwise,  
We all remain

Too

Frightened.

## TWO BEARS

Once  
After a hard day's forage  
Two bears sat together in silence  
On a beautiful vista  
Watching the sun go down  
And feeling deeply grateful  
For life.

Though, after a while  
A thought-provoking conversation began  
Which turned to the topic of  
Fame.

The one bear said,  
"Did you hear about Rustam?  
He has become famous  
And travels from city to city  
In a golden cage;

He performs to hundreds of people  
Who laugh and applaud  
His carnival  
Stunts."

The other bear thought for  
A few seconds

Then started  
Weeping.

## THE WARRIOR

The warriors tame  
The beasts in their past  
So that the night's hoofs  
Can no longer break the jeweled vision  
In the heart.

The intelligent and the brave  
Open every closet in the future and evict  
All the mind's ghosts who have the bad habit  
Of barfing everywhere.

For a long time the Universe  
Has been germinating in your spine

But only a *Pir*\* has the talent,  
The courage to slay  
The past-giant, the future-anxieties.

The warrior  
Wisely sits in a circle  
With other men  
Gathering the strength to unmask  
Himself,

Then  
Sits, giving,  
Like a great illumined planet on  
The  
Earth.

\* Persian: Saint

## Tiny Gods

Some gods say, the tiny ones,  
"I am not here in your vibrant, moist lips  
That need to beach themselves upon  
The golden shore of a  
Naked body."

Some gods say, "I am not  
The scarred yearning in the unrequited soul;  
I am not the blushing cheek  
Of every star and  
Planet-

I am not the applauding Chef  
Of those precious secretions that can distill  
The whole mind into a perfect wincing jewel, if only  
For a moment;  
Nor do I reside in every pile of sweet warm dung  
Born of the earth's  
Gratuity."

Some gods say, the ones we need to hang,  
"Your mouth is not designed to know His,  
Love was not born to consume  
The luminous  
Realms."

Dear ones,  
Beware of the tiny gods frightened men  
Create  
To bring an anesthetic relief  
To their sad  
Days.

## ELEGANCE

It  
Is not easy  
To stop thinking ill  
Of others.

Usually one must enter into a friendship  
With a person

Who has accomplished that great feat himself  
Then

Something  
Might start to rub off on you  
Of that

True  
Elegance.

## DROPPING KEYS

The small man

Builds cages for everyone

He

Knows.

While the sage,

Who has to duck his head

When the moon is low,

Keeps dropping keys all night long

For the

Beautiful

Rowdy

Prisoners.

## Spiced Manna

Someone  
Will steal you if you don't  
Stay near,

And sell you as a slave in the  
Market.

I sing  
To the nightingales' hearts  
Hoping they will learn  
My verse

So that no one will ever imprison  
Your brilliant angel  
Feathers.

Have I put enough spiced manna  
On your plate  
Tonight

In this Tavern  
Where Hafiz  
Serves?

If not please wait  
For more light is now  
Fermenting.

Someone will steal you if you  
Don't stay near,

And sell you as a slave in  
The market,  
So your Beloved and I  
Sing.

## BECOMING HUMAN

Once a man came to me and spoke for hours about  
"His great visions of God" he felt he was having.

He asked me for confirmation, saying,  
"Are these wondrous dreams true?"

I replied, "How many goats do you have?"

He looked surprised and said,  
"I am speaking of sublime visions  
And you ask  
About goats!"

And I spoke again saying,  
"Yes, brother – how many do you have?"

"Well, Hafiz, I have sixty-two."

'And how many wives?"  
Again he looked surprised, then said,  
"Four."

"How many rose bushes in your garden,  
How many children,  
Are your parents still alive,  
Do you feed the birds in winter?"

And to all he answered.

Then I said,  
"You asked me if I thought your visions were true,

I would say that they were if they make you become  
More human,

More kind to every creature and plant  
That you know."

## THE THOUSAND-STRINGED INSTRUMENT

The heart is  
The thousand-stringed instrument.

Our sadness and fear come from being  
Out of tune with love.

All day long God coaxes my lips  
To speak,

So that your tears will not stain  
His green dress.

It is not that the Friend is vain,  
It is just your life we care about.

Sometimes the Beloved  
Takes my pen in hand,  
For Hafiz is just a simple man.

The other day the Old One  
Wrote on the Tavern wall:

"The heart is  
The thousand-stringed instrument

That can only be tuned with  
Love."

The God Who Only Knows  
Four Words

Every

Child

Has known God,

Not the God of names,

Not the God of don'ts,

Not the God who ever does

Anything weird,

But the God who only knows four words

And keeps repeating them, saying:

"Come dance with Me."

Come

Dance.

## THE DIAMOND TAKES SHAPE

Some parrots  
Have become so skilled with  
The human voice

They could give a brilliant discourse  
About freedom and God

And an unsighted man nearby might  
Even begin applauding with  
The thought:

I just heard jewels fall from a  
Great saint's mouth,

Though my Master used to say,

"The diamond takes shape slowly  
With integrity's great force,

And from

The profound courage to never relinquish love."

Some parrots have become so skilled  
With words,  
The blind turn over their gold  
And lives to caged

Feathers.

## WHAT IS THE ROOT?

What

Is the

Root of all these

Words?

One thing: love.

But a love so deep and sweet

It needed to express itself

With scents, sounds, colors

That never before

Existed.

## TROUBLED?

Troubled?  
Then stay with me, for I'm not.

Lonely?  
A thousand naked amorous ones dwell in ancient caves  
Beneath my eyelids.

Riches?  
Here's a pick,  
My whole body is an emerald that begs,  
"Take me."

Write all that worries you on a piece of parchment;  
Offer it to God.  
Even from the distance of a millennium

I can lean the flame in my heart  
Into your life

And turn  
All that frightens you  
Into holy  
Incense  
Ash.

## ACT GREAT

What is the key  
To untie the knot of your mind's suffering?

What  
Is the esoteric secret  
To slay the crazed one whom each of us  
Did wed

And who can ruin  
Our heart's and eye's exquisite tender  
Landscape?

Hafiz has found  
Two emerald words that  
Restored  
Me

That I now cling to as I would sacred  
Tresses of my Beloved's  
Hair:

Act great.  
My dear, always act great.

What is the key  
To untie the knot of the mind's suffering?

Benevolent thought, sound  
And movement.