

Spiritual madness and its many definitions, according to Hafiz, Western psychology, and Stanislav Grof.

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“The great religions are the ships, Poets the life boats. Every sane person I know has jumped overboard.”

-Hafiz

“What else can Hafiz do tonight, to celebrate the madness, the Joy of seeing God Everywhere!”

-Hafiz

From the perspective of Western materialist science and psychology, the dividing line between mystical experiences, such as those of traditional societies, and that of madness, appears in many cases to be non-existent. The unofficial opinion of Western psychological thought seems to regard mysticism as a phenomenon that lies somewhere between normalcy and psychosis. By disregarding, and even pathologizing, sacred states of mystical consciousness and experience, Western science has in effect reduced one of the most important and basic aspects of human life that has been revered for millennia. The lack of scientific proof of the spiritual dimensions of life is seen as evidence that no such dimensions beyond the physical one exist, and therefore everything related to spirituality and the Divine is reduced to immature fantasy from a bygone and outgrown pre-industrial belief system. This Western scientific viewpoint, unfortunately, extends to the modern tenets and foundation of Western psychology which have dominated our current understanding of healthy psychological functioning. This point is clearly established when one considers the fact that in our modern Western society, if an individual had the type of illuminative and intense mystical experiences that established

and sustained religions throughout the world, this individual could very well be referred to a psychiatrist or mental health facility.

Similar mystical and religious experiences to the ones mentioned in ancient and sacred texts are many times seen as indication of a mental disease that requires treatment such as hospitalization, tranquilizing medicine and stigmatizing labels, according to a modern and limited model of man as the sole sum of his biological corporeal being and postnatal biography. Intense and authentic mystical states of elevated consciousness are seen as signposts to the healthy spiritual development of an individual in traditional societies and literature. However, these states are oftentimes viewed as states of regressive and pathological mental illness in the modern Western oriented psychological framework that governs much of our current understanding of man and his reality.

The pioneering work of the Czechoslovakian consciousness researcher Stanislav Grof has demonstrated that the Western oriented psychological framework is inadequate to address the spiritual dimensions of human life and healthy psychological functioning. Grof has proposed a revised cartography to the human psyche which incorporates many of the psychological states as they were understood by traditional societies and their psychology. In this revised framework to modern psychology, instances of what is contemporarily defined as madness or psychological dysfunction is reevaluated as a temporary but potentially healthy process in the context of spiritual growth and awareness. Grof coined the term “spiritual emergency” to define a potentially positive condition of psychospiritual development that is associated with certain aspects of the modern definition of madness and dysfunction. The term spiritual emergency refers to the potential interplay between the crisis itself and the spiritual opportunity it presents.

As the human being proceeds along the spectrum of spiritual development and awareness, what is understood as “normal” psychological functioning can be interrupted by psychosomatic episodes of depression, anxiety, and even temporary psychosis as the individual begins to increase their awareness by incorporating and assimilating spiritual elements from beyond their postnatal biography. Spiritual emergencies that exhibit elements of madness, if allowed to take their natural course, can prove to be beneficial states of psychospiritual growth that improve psychosomatic health, provide an enhanced meaning of life and expanded worldview, and lead an individual to a higher level of consciousness evolution.

In traditional psychology and societies, the relationship between madness and spiritual development is seen as a line that is less defined, and is in fact a signpost to progression along the spiritual path. In Sufism, the concept of madness as a spiritual state of intense love and longing for the Divine is not necessarily seen as case of psychosis or unordered chaos, but rather a spiritual technique for achieving conscious union with the Creator. To the Sufi, the seemingly external irrationality of Divine love for the Beloved is given precedence over reason of the mind. This relationship is made evident in Persian Sufi literature which frequently uses the imagery of the heart of the lover, wine and its intoxication. In this context the imagery of wine is Divine love and knowledge, and the state of intoxication from wine a form of spiritual madness that results from its drinking. This symbolism between spiritual love and madness is one of the themes of the poetry of Hafiz, the master of Persian Sufi poetry, who integrates the Sufi philosophy of consumption and integration of the personal ego and identity into that of the larger unified Divine Essence. The imagery of wine, consumption, and madness as intoxication appears as a reoccurring theme in the mystical poetry of Hafiz. This essay

will seek to examine the definition and relationship between madness as a spiritual state as described by Hafiz and the Sufis, to that of its interpretation by modern Western oriented psychology and Stanislav Grof using the concept of “spiritual emergency”.

MADNESS AS FRAGMENTATION

In many of the world’s great mystical and religious literature, such as Sufism, there exists a major and reoccurring theme of unity between the individual “self” and the undivided cosmic “Self” as central to understanding the nature of reality. In Sufi metaphysics, the concept of “*Wahdat-al-Wujud*” or the “Unity of Being”, is a Sufi philosophy emphasizing that ‘there is no true existence except the Ultimate Truth (God)’. Thus, the existence of God is the only truth and the concept of a separate created universe is a falsehood. This awareness, understanding, and absorption into the one Divine Source is also expressed through the concept of “wholeness”, which is associated throughout human language as linked with integration, holiness and togetherness; the polar opposite expressed as fragmentation, divisiveness, and evil. This metaphysical understanding of wholeness and fragmentation, or unity and duality, is therefore understood as a centrifugal and paramount component in the context of the world’s authentic religious traditions, mystical literature and traditional psychologies, the aim of which is the transformation of the individual’s consciousness and psyche into the larger harmonious whole, or Divine Ground of Being. However, the process of integrating and merging the individual self with the larger Divine Self is a reconciliatory process that has been recognized throughout human history as one inherent with difficulty, struggles, and in some cases danger (with the exception of Divine Grace). As man begins to increase his awareness into his nature and that of reality, dualistic references (age, nationality, gender, societal role, etc.) that he has associated with his entire life and have led to fragmentation

and separation, loosen their grip on his psyche and being as his consciousness begins to synthesize the unity of the Divine Essence. In psychological terms, this process could result in seemingly regressive development such as abnormal behavior, visions, and detachment from worldly pursuits or interests. Traditional psychologies and cultures understand this process of integration, and therefore any temporary behavior or states associated with it, to be a positive development in light of the spiritual truth and knowledge they unfold for the individual and collective group. However, modern Western oriented psychology and materialist science has disregarded and even condemned the spiritual aspects of the integration process and deemed any associated behaviors as “regressive”, “pathological”, or “mad”, even if they ultimately lead to healing and higher functioning. In traditional shamanic cultures, internal fragmentation, or what would be considered “madness” today, was an intentional process directing a practitioner to dismantle his or her ego structures as a way of learning to navigate different levels of realities with the goal of accessing higher states of knowledge. The initiatory experience of shamans can typically begin with sudden and extreme illnesses (known as “shamanic illness”) that is psychological in nature, consisting of shamanic visions that parallel our modern conception of psychosis. These shamanic experiences are accepted and sanctioned by the traditional culture as authentic when they lead to religious insights and growth, whereas those experiences that are not voluntarily induced, unwanted, or not socially supported are seen as instances of real “madness” in the traditional sense.

Similarly, the Sufi concept of spiritual madness can be seen in light of the dominant themes involving unity, love for the Beloved, and the intensity that this love produces, oftentimes directly expressed as such in Sufi literature. However, the madness

expressed in Sufi literature is not the madness of Western or even traditional psychology, which exhibits characteristics of alienation, chaos and fragmentation, but rather that of a Divine love so powerful that the recipient (or lover in Sufi terms) is totally transfixed by a Beauty that lovingly shakes the very foundations of one's ego and notion of separate existence. This love is then to be experienced over and over again, through discipline and devotion, until the Sufi has become totally absorbed and assimilated in a spiritual state of ecstasy that has annihilated the individual ego ("*fana*" in Arabic) into the Beloved. Spiritual madness, from the Sufi perspective, can in certain instances be exhibited as an attraction and love for the Beloved that is so strong the lover loses all interest in worldly pursuits and its pleasures and desires nothing more than to love God. The mystical careers of some Sufi dervishes may have begun by a sudden and intense spiritual awakening and desire that was so strong, the apparent absorption in inner life and rejection of the outer world may have incorrectly fit criteria for what we now label as mental illness. In his landmark book on Meher Baba, William Donkin documents many cases of "*masts*", or God-intoxicated individuals, who find themselves drawn to an "irresistible implosion in the yearning to realize God as the Divine Beloved". Donkin details that "as the *mast* advances along the inner planes, his desire to unite with the Divine Beloved is so strong that he is taken beyond the brain (to use Grof's term) and his mental constitution subjected to so much upheaval, that he is unable to use his mind in ordinary ways." It is very important to note at this point that although the ultimate aim of Sufism is the annihilation of the ego and integration of unified consciousness (self into Self) in this lifetime, the optimal level of spiritual achievement is a balancing of spiritual duties and earthy responsibilities, with emphasis on the former. However, the case of the *masts* as documented by Donkin make a clear distinction between instances of spiritual intoxication (spiritual madness) as distinct from pathological madness.

The fabled and enduring story of Layla and Majnun, as later adapted by Sufi poetical masters such as Attar, Rumi and Ghazzali, illustrates the Sufi concept of Divine Love and madness. In the traditional tale, modified many times over the centuries, a young Arab Bedouin named Qays meets and falls desperately in love with a woman named Layla at a gathering of women. Qays is utterly transformed, prompting Qays to approach Layla's father to ask for her hand in marriage. But when Layla's father rejects his request, Qays is plunged into darkness and despair, losing his mind and reason when he escapes into the wilderness to live with the wild animals. In an attempt to cure his son of his love stricken madness, Qay's father takes him on pilgrimage to Mecca, but the experience reinforces and intensifies his love for Layla, earning him the name of "*Majnun*" which means "crazy" in Arabic and Persian. The great Sufi poets later modified the story of Layla and Majnun to symbolize the relationship between the Divine Essence and the intense love that it produces which can, in many instances, evoke feelings, behaviors, and attitudes that appear "abnormal" inasmuch as they stir awareness of faculties that are seemingly not of "normal" reason and logic. As discussed in the foregoing, madness as a concept and theme of spiritual love for the Beloved has been expressed many times over throughout Sufi literature, and in particular, by the greatest of all Sufi poets, Hafiz of Shiraz.

INTOXICATION OF THE *RIND*

Shemsuddin Mahommad, known by his poetical surname of Hafiz was born in Shiraz in the fourteenth century. His name is translated as and signified as "One who can recite the Koran", and he was known to his compatriots as "Tongue of the Hidden" and "Interpreter of Secrets", and is regarded and beloved the world over as the master of

Persian poetry and the *ghazal* form. The incredible genius, beauty, and majesty that constitute Hafiz's poetry is exponentially compounded in divine manner when one considers the fact that the body of his work was written over the course of a life that ultimately resulted in God-realization. Hafiz's poetry is therefore a gift to humanity inasmuch as it provides Divine guidance and insights (both highs and lows) into the transformation of consciousness of a human being, written from the Sufi perspective. Much has been written about the seeming ambiguity and paradoxical nature of Hafiz's poetry and symbolism in the West, which has resulted in him being incorrectly branded a hedonist by some scholars. On the face of it, and taken for its literal meaning as concepts or a message, the symbolism of Hafiz's poetry with its frequent references of wine, drunkenness, intoxication, erotic imagery and apparent rebellion, seem to be prima facie evidence of the worldview and life of a poet immersed in hedonism and debauchery. However, this is not necessarily an accurate interpretation of his poetry and corpus, inasmuch as one must fully and correctly consider the environment and larger Persian consciousness of the day, which was deeply intertwined with Sufi philosophy that saw the Divine Essence in every aspect of creation, as explained in the Doctrine of *Whadat-al-Wujud*. Therefore the symbolic imagery mentioned throughout Hafiz's poetry is understood as an aspect of the Divine Beloved "beyond" its literal meaning, and in the context of the many manifestations of the spiritual essence which is brilliantly used to veil the poet's true feelings. Wine is correctly understood to mean Divine Knowledge and Love; the cup the lover's heart; intoxication the state of total bewilderment and amazement with God; the tavern the place of instruction or worship; erotic imagery the many aspects of God; and rebellion (or "*rind*") as an act of embracing the inner esoteric path of Sufism for that of exoteric religious dogma.

In light of the deeper spiritual meaning of Hafiz's poetical imagery, the particular concept of "madness" as a reoccurring theme in his poetry will be examined through an understanding of the symbolism of intoxication and the figure of the '*rind*'. The word *rind* is a Persian word that has been translated to refer to a person who is of suspect character and motives, and who appears to be, using modern interpretations, a wandering free-spirited drunkard who lives by his own rules, whose outside behavior invites criticism and suspicion, but who has a solid heart and morality. The path of the *rind* is a path of love and intuition, and does not rely on reason alone. When one thinks of the *rind*, we are reminded of the wandering Sufi dervishes singing and chanting in the streets while living a life of utter simplicity and moral elevation in God. Although this is not the path that Hafiz took in his own life, the image of the wandering dervish helps to illustrate the *rind*'s position within the spectrum of the relationship between the *Shariah* (Islamic law) and the *Tariqah* (esoteric path of Sufism). The two paths are not opposite, but both necessary for the soul's development along the spiritual journey. However, at times throughout the history of Sufism the strict interpretation of *Shariah* by those in the religious clergy created tensions between those worshipers engaged in *Tariqah*, and may have been the inspiration behind much Sufi literature. Paul Smith, the English language translator of Hafiz poetry, has commented that the image of the *rind* in Hafiz's poetry is used as a "symbol of protest to the formal and dogmatic religious path, to a place of inner wisdom that is beyond reason and belongs to the realm of love. Smith also comments that the symbol of the *rind* was used by Hafiz to denote a spiritual position rooted in the inner knowledge of God, as he is only conscious and absorbed in his love for the Beloved here on Earth, withdrawing from the outside world's attachments, but not its responsibilities, to concentrate on the inner reality. This apparent abandoning of the outer world and its desires and cravings as well as the charting of a course that is outside

any formal adherence to the *Shariah* for the inner truth that is the Beloved, could be seen as a kind of “madness”. However, the state of madness as described by Hafiz is one of absorption and amazement in the reality of the Divine Essence. As with the *masts*, this madness is not of a psychological nature but one of total spiritual absorption that signifies awakening to a spiritual truth that is not alone, separated or fragmented, as in the case of authentic madness, but one of union with God. In the same fashion, Hafiz’s symbolism of drunkenness and intoxication also serves to illustrate this imagery of divine madness. According to Meher Baba, the “lover’s drunkenness makes him desire God all the more, and serves as a spiritual thirst until he draws nearer and nearer to the Divine. In this process, his desire to drink more and more causes him to forget the world, which draws criticism and ridicule, but nevertheless propels him to seek more wine until he is intoxicated in a state of Divine absorption”. Intoxication as madness is also seen here not as the madness of the lone addict but as that of a healthy spiritual pilgrim who desires nothing more than union with God, and stands in clear distinction to the psychopathology of actual madness.

SPIRITUAL EMERGENCY

The Sufi concept of madness and the imagery of intoxication and the *rind*, parallels the experiential observations of consciousness research conducted over the last forty years by Dr. Stanislav Grof, who has observed countless encounters of individuals involved in difficult and transformative levels of non-ordinary states of consciousness that are mislabeled as psychotic by modern Western psychology. As mentioned previously, these “spiritual emergencies” are very often authentic mystical or transpersonal experiences that, if allowed to run their course, can lead to healing and spiritual growth. Grof has surveyed and detailed Western science’s arrogance and all-

assuming dismissal of the perennial wisdom of mystical traditions of the world. They have time and again rejected the fact that the world's mystical traditions are the result of thousands of years of experiential research and analysis into the human being, the nature of the soul and reality, and the cosmos itself. The errors involved in accepting the Newtonian-Cartesian model of reality is that everything in existence is reduced to objective reality and consists solely of matter and the operative function of particles. Spiritual experiences, such as those that are unitive in nature, are therefore invalidated as mental illness since they seem to incorporate elements from beyond the level of objective reality. The madness and intoxication involved in the deepest levels of the love for God, as symbolized by Sufi poets such as Hafiz, are therefore explained in pathological terms by modern science since it is beyond the current conception and physical limitations of the human mind. On the night of *Al Kader* (or The Divine Decree) when the Prophet Mohammed, the first Sufi of the Islamic tradition, received the revelations from the Angel Gabriel, he was in a visionary and ecstatic state so powerful that he approached annihilation. He was immersed, in the Sufi sense, in total intoxication for the love and reverence for God. According to traditional accounts, Mohammed came trembling and agitated to Cadijah in the morning, not knowing whether what he had seen and heard was indeed true, or rather mere visions or delusions. He was at first deeply distressed by his revelations as the magnitude was no doubt difficult, yet beautiful. The Divine message and revelations were allowed to run their course in Mohammed's life, and his initial and subsequent mystical experiences later became the basis for the Suras of the *Qur'an*, and transformed the spiritual lives of billions. However, modern Western science has classified this state as one of psychosis and, if this had happened today, would have advocated treatment with suppressive medicines and stigmatizing labels, ignoring the fact that this "episode of unitive consciousness", one of the eleven hallmark indicators of

spiritual emergency, eventually led to a total life transformation and access to sacred knowledge so holy its recipient became the Universal Man, revered as the last Prophet throughout the world. The unity of being and consciousness that the Sufi's strive for is very similar to the episodes of unitive consciousness that Grof has observed. He also has documented the fact that "persons in intense psychospiritual crisis are usually so deeply involved in his or her experience that they forget about food, drink and some aspects of hygiene, and that it is up to the client's helpers to assist with basic needs". These documented observations are very similar to the "God-intoxicated" and "God-mad" states of consciousness noted by Meher Baba and Dr. Donkin, who conclude in similar fashion that these experiences are distinctly different from authentic psychotic states.

The concept and symbolism of the *rind* in Hafiz's poetry is also discussed here to illustrate the fascinating parallel Grof has observed and documented in his work with the healing states of non-ordinary consciousness. Much has been written about Hafiz's approach to spiritual life from the standpoint of the *rind*, or one who is an outsider to formal religious dogma and ritual and chooses to seek union with the Beloved through God-intoxicated or God-Mad states. In his life it was this outlook that apparently contributed to Hafiz's criticism of the ruling dogmatic and esoteric religious authority of his day, which he sometimes saw as hypocritical and violating the inner esoteric truth whilst appearing to uphold the outer exoteric truth. Hafiz reached such a state of such elevated consciousness, and in fact achieved God-realization, that he was beyond dogmatic rituals and saw only the Beloved. In light of this and Hafiz's spiritual stance as one of the *rind*, it is interesting to note that Grof has observed similar outlooks from many individuals who have had profound psychospiritual experiences. He has noted that whenever individuals reach achieve the transpersonal or cosmic levels of their being, it

almost always leads to spiritual awakening that is solely interested in the mystical quest rather than mainstream and dogmatic exoteric religious paths, which he believes have lost entirely their direct visionary sources of transpersonal realities. He further notes that individuals who have powerful spiritual experiences that arise out of intense non-ordinary states of consciousness typically become interested in and make contact with the mystical branches of the world's great religions, such as Sufism. He believes that the important division in the world of spirituality is not the line that separates the individual mainstream religions from each other, but rather the one that separates them all from their mystical branches. It is interesting to note that the typical result of intense psychospiritual states of non-ordinary consciousness oftentimes lead individuals to mystical beliefs that are outside their normal mainstream religious form, and this "outsider" stance where God alone is desired appears very similar to the path of the *rind* as advocated and lived by Hafiz.

CONCLUSION

This essay has attempted to examine the concept of spiritual madness as a reoccurring theme in the symbolic imagery of the Persian Sufi poetical master Hafiz, and the relationship to its definition in modern Western oriented psychology as compared to that of consciousness researcher Stanislav Grof. The poetical imagery of Hafiz of Shiraz uses the symbolism of madness and intoxication as an exalted spiritual state. Hafiz advocated unreason and surrendering of the mind to all thoughts and desires other than the love of God, through the spiritual stance of the *rind* or outsider. Here the concept of spiritual madness is juxtaposed with actual madness in the psychological sense, as Hafiz's desired intoxication and stance of a *rind* are outside the conventions that "normal" dogmatic religion delineates. However, the spiritual madness of Hafiz and the

Sufis is not pathological in the sense of modern Western oriented psychology, but rather a healthy process of spiritual awakening and deep enchantment or unitive consciousness. Unfortunately, many of the mystical states of consciousness, or spiritual madness, are regarded as psychotic conditions that are currently recommended to be treated with suppressive medications. Grof has documented and proved that in many instances these mystical states of divine madness are not psychotic illness, but are difficult stages of radical personality transformation and spiritual awakening. Grof has named these difficult states “spiritual emergencies” which, if correctly understood and supported, can result in emotional healing and consciousness evolution¹. The ecstatic and unitive experiences that Grof describes appear very similar to those of the Sufis, expressed in the poetry of lived spiritual experience of which Hafiz writes. Such experiences can bring one from fragmentation to a healthy spiritual wholeness free from the sense of alienation that is so deeply rooted in actual psychological madness. Grof’s work and research into the healing potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness confirm the claims of the perennial philosophy and that of the great mystical traditions such as Sufism, whose desired spiritual “madness” frees one from the limitations of our fragmented material existence and ego boundaries to seek union with the Beloved.

**" NOT one is filled with madness like to mine
In all the taverns! my soiled robe lies here,
There my neglected book, both pledged for wine.
With dust my heart is thick, that should be clear,
A glass to mirror forth the Great King's face;
One ray of light from out Thy dwelling-place
To pierce my night, oh God! and draw me near "**

-Hafiz

¹ While modern Western oriented psychology does often overlook or even pathologize mystical states, the opposite error of romanticizing psychotic states is not intended, as some cases may indicate a serious medical problem.

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