

## The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam - Edward Fitzgerald

L4828DVD

Teachers / Student Resource Guide

### Program Synopsis:

#### Background:

The term “Rubaiyat” is the plural of the Farsi word for quatrains (a four line stanza). Thus *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* literally translates as “The four line stanzas of Omar Khayyam.” The poem is actually a work with two authors who lived several centuries apart. Omar Khayyam (whose surname can be translated as “tentmaker”), lived in Persia between 1048 CE and 1131 CE. He was born in the city of Naishapur, located about 250 miles (418 km) from present-day Tehran in Iran. His home province, Khorassan was prosperous, with wealth based both on agriculture and trade. Eight years before his birth, the region was conquered by Turkman invaders who were recent converts to Islam, and the territory was then under the jurisdiction of the Caliphate in Baghdad. Omar Khayyam became one of the best known mathematicians and astronomers of his day. He had studied the works of the great scholar Avicenna, who was highly influenced by the ideas of Aristotle, and a proponent of Greek science and philosophy. Omar Khayyam was instrumental in the reforms to the Persian Calendar in 1074, and also did significant work on solving cubic equations using geometric constructions. He also investigated the nature and implications of Euclid’s Fifth Postulate (known as “The Famous Fifth”). At a later point in his career, he fell out of favor with the authorities, and it was during this time that he composed the quatrains that would form the basis of what we now know as *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

The poem was unknown in the West until it a copy of the quatrains was discovered in the Bodleian Library at Oxford in England by Edward Byles Cowell, who then gave it to his friend, Edward Fitzgerald (1809 – 1883) in 1856. Fitzgerald, who had already been working on translating other works from Persian into English, translated the poem and published the first edition on 1859. The poem received almost no attention until a copy was discovered by Dante Gabriel Rossetti the following year in a bargain sale of books. It was Rossetti who is credited with popularizing the poem. Afterwards, Fitzgerald revised his translation several times. By the time the third edition came out, Fitzgerald was known to be the translator. In all, Fitzgerald produced 5 editions of the poem, with the last being published in 1879.

## Structure of the Poem:

The first and second editions of the poem consist of 75 and 110 quatrains respectively, while the third, fourth and fifth editions contain 101. The original Persian quatrains were not constrained to any particular ordering, and it was understood that they could be rearranged at will. Fitzgerald is credited with arranging and translating the quatrains in such manner as to make them more thematically consistent. The poem is written in iambic pentameter, and in most of the quatrains, the rhyme scheme is aaba (the first, second, and last lines have end rhymes):

### Quatrain II

Before the phantom of False morning died,  
Methought a Voice within the Tavern cried,  
"When all the Temple is prepared within,  
"Why nods the drowsy Worshiper outside?"

Some of the quatrains have a rhyme scheme of aaaa (all four lines have end rhymes):

### Quatrain XXXII

There was the Door to which I found no Key;  
There was the Veil through which I might not see;  
Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE  
There was—and then no more of THEE and ME.

## Themes:

### **Carpe Diem (Seize the Day):**

On the surface, a great deal of the poem deals with the idea that life is fleeting, so one should "seize the day." A number of the quatrains clearly suggest this idea:

III.

And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before  
The Tavern shouted—"Open then the Door!  
"You know how little while we have to stay,  
And, once departed, may return no more."

Paraphrase: The day has begun! Hurry up and open the door so we can live our lives – time is short.

XXIV.

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,  
Before we too into the Dust descend;  
Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie,  
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans End!

Paraphrase: Make the most of the time we have in this life. Soon enough, we will die, and there will be no more wine or song.

**Wine as the Water of Life:** The “wine” of life is the substance that makes life worth living. It is the sum total of all of life’s experiences: the joys, the heartbreaks, the triumphs, and the tragedies. Drink deep and drink well of this “wine”

VIII.

Whether at Naishapur or Babylon,  
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,  
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,  
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.

Paraphrase: Wherever you may be, whether life is good or bad, time passes, and the substance of life is running out – drop by drop.

LIV.

Waste not your Hour, nor in the vain pursuit  
Of This and That endeavor and dispute;  
Better be jocund with the fruitful Grape  
Than sadden after none, or bitter, Fruit.

Paraphrase: Don’t waste your time pursuing things that do not matter at the expense of living life! Better to live now, than to later regret not living because you spent all of your time pursuing things that do not matter.

LIX.

The Grape that can with Logic absolute  
The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute:  
The sovereign Alchemist that in a trice  
Life’s leaden metal into Gold transmute;

Paraphrase: The act of truly living is more powerful than logic or reason. It can change the most mundane of things into gold.

**Fate :** No matter how much we may think that we are in control of our existence, fate ultimately does with us as it will. In some sense, we are all powerless to overcome destiny.

XXII.

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best  
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,  
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,  
And one by one crept silently to rest.

Paraphrase: We are all destined to die! Time, like a press that squeezes the juice from the grape rolls over us and squeezes the life from us.

XXV.

Alike for those who for TO-DAY prepare,  
And those that after some TO-MORROW stare,  
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries,  
"Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There."

Paraphrase: It does not really matter what plans you make or what dreams you have, ultimately, each of us has the same reward: death.

XLV.

'Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest  
A Sultan to the realm of Death address;  
The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrash  
Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest.

Paraphrase: We go about our business, intent on the task at hand, but death strikes at an unknown hour, and all that we have is left for others to enjoy.

LXVIII.

We are no other than a moving row  
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go  
Round with the Sun-illuminated Lantern held  
In Midnight by the Master of the Show;

Paraphrase: We think that we are in control of our lives, but forces of which we are unaware are in control.

LXIX.

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays  
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;  
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,  
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

Paraphrase: We are helpless in the face of a greater power working behind the curtains of existence, and we are moved around the game-board of life for purposes that we do not understand until we die.

LXXI.

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

Paraphrase: Fate writes the story of our lives, and once written, nothing that we can do will change what has happened.

## The Futility of Human Understanding:

XXVI.

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd  
Of the Two Worlds so wisely--they are thrust  
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn  
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

Paraphrase: No matter how "wise" or "learned" we become, our arguments and theories are foolishness, and our voices are silenced by death.

XXVII.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about: but evermore  
Came out by the same door where in I went.

Paraphrase: In my youth, I sought out teachers so that I could learn wisdom. I heard great discussions and arguments, but ultimately, I was the same person as when I began.

XXXI.

Up from Earth's Center through the Seventh Gate  
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,  
And many a Knot unravel'd by the Road;  
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate.

Paraphrase: Even though I attained the highest learning in the land, I still could not answer the most fundamental question of all: "what is our fate?"

LVI.

For "Is" and "Is-not" though with Rule and Line  
And "UP-AND-DOWN" by Logic I define,  
Of all that one should care to fathom, I  
was never deep in anything but--Wine.

LVII.

Ah, by my Computations, People say,  
Reduce the Year to better reckoning?--Nay,  
'Twas only striking from the Calendar  
Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday.

LXV.

The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd  
Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn'd,  
Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep  
They told their comrades, and to Sleep return'd.

Paraphrase: No matter what logic I used, or calculations I made, I achieved nothing of lasting value.

**Agnosticism/ Questioning Sacred Law:**

XIII.

Some for the Glories of This World; and some  
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;  
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,  
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

Paraphrase: Some pursue worldly endeavors, and some strive for the divine. It is better to live now and not worry about such things.

LXI.

Why, be this Juice the growth of God, who dare  
Blaspheme the twisted tendril as a Snare?  
A Blessing, we should use it, should we not?  
And if a Curse--why, then, Who set it there?

Paraphrase: Life was given to us by God! Why should we not live it to the fullest? It is a blessing; if it is a curse, then, who gave it to us?

LXII.

I must abjure the Balm of Life, I must,  
Scared by some After-reckoning ta'en on trust,  
Or lured with Hope of some Diviner Drink,  
To fill the Cup--when crumbled into Dust!

Paraphrase: Should we abandon the pleasures of this life because of a promise of a reward in the next? Should we avoid pleasures now because of supposed judgment later?

LXIII.

Of threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!  
One thing at least is certain--This Life flies;  
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;  
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

Paraphrase: No matter what promises or threats we may believe about the afterlife, one thing is for sure: this life is over quickly. Once you die, there is no more chance to live.

LXVII.

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,  
And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on fire,  
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,  
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

Paraphrase: Heaven is a wishful reflection of good things that we have experienced here on earth; hell a vision based on earthly suffering.

LXXIX

What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke  
A conscious Something to resent the yoke

Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain  
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

LXXIX.

What! from his helpless Creature be repaid  
Pure Gold for what he lent him dross-allay'd--  
Sue for a Debt he never did contract,  
And cannot answer--Oh the sorry trade!

Paraphrase: Really! We should fear something retribution or judgment from a being that we invented?  
We should have to pay penalties for something that we never agreed to?

LXXX.

Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin  
Beset the Road I was to wander in,  
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round  
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!

LXXXI.

Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,  
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:  
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man  
Is blacken'd--Man's forgiveness give--and take!

Paraphrase: If God made man and earth, then he also made the temptations and opportunities for sin as well. He should forgive us for these "sins" that he contrived, and is also in need of our forgiveness.

**Life Must Be Experienced:**

XII.

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread--and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness--  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

Paraphrase: Not much is needed to be truly happy! Some poetry, food, wine, and a companion is all that is required. Enjoy the simple things and be happy!

XLI.

Perplext no more with Human or Divine,  
To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign,  
And lose your fingers in the tresses of  
The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine.

Paraphrase: Do not spend time worrying about the complexities of humans or God. Do not worry about making elaborate plans for the future either! Rather, lose yourself in life itself. Live!

**Life is Fleeting:**

VII.

Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring  
Your Winter garment of Repentance fling:  
The Bird of Time has but a little way  
To flutter--and the Bird is on the Wing.

Paraphrase: Live life to the fullest while you have it. Enjoy what you have now. Life is short, and time is passing quickly.

XXIII.

And we, that now make merry in the Room  
They left, and Summer dresses in new bloom,  
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth  
Descend--ourselves to make a Couch--for whom?

Paraphrase: We are enjoying the fruits of those who came before us! Live now, for soon enough, others will enjoy the fruits of our labors.

XLVIII.

A Moment's Halt--a momentary taste  
Of BEING from the Well amid the Waste--  
And Lo!--the phantom Caravan has reach'd  
The NOTHING it set out from--Oh, make haste!

Paraphrase: We will be staying in Life's inn for just a short time before our travels are over.



### Questions for Further Study

1. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859, the same year that Fitzgerald published the first edition of the Rubaiyat. What central ideas do the two works share? Specifically, what do they say about the role of God in our everyday lives.
2. Some think that the Rubaiyat is just a poem about drinking. Give four specific examples from the text, together with their interpretations that you think indicate otherwise.
3. In Western traditions, the "cup" can represent the Holy Grail. Select three passages from the text and interpret them with this in mind.
4. What does "the grape" represent in the poem? What characteristics does it possess in terms of its effect on the author?
5. How would you describe the mental state of the author? What does the mood and tone of the poem tell you about Omar's views about life?
6. Given that Omar Khayyam was a noted mathematician and astronomer, are there any parts of the poem that reflect his expertise in these areas?
7. What difficulties do you think that Fitzgerald faced translating the Rubaiyat into English? Why do you think that he produced 5 different translations?
8. It has been suggested that the poem symbolically represents one day. How would you divide the poem up into parts corresponding to one day? What would the parts symbolize?
9. Explain what is meant by the symbolisms in Quatrain VIII by the last two stanzas: The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop, The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.
10. Explain the poet's meaning in the last two stanzas of Quatrain XXIV: Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie, Sans Wine, Sans Song, Sans Singer, and Sans End!
11. In Quatrain XXXII, the poet talks of a "Door to which I found no Key; ... the Veil through which I could not see:" What do the metaphors used here represent?
12. Omar Khayyam was a prominent mathematician and astronomer in his time. In this context, explain what he meant when he wrote in Quatrain LV: You know my friends, with what a brave Carouse I made a Second Marriage in my house; Divorced old barren reason from my bed, And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.
13. Explain the symbolisms of the "door of Darkness" and the "Road" in Quatrain LXIV: Strange, is it not? That of the myriads who Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through, Not one returned to tell us of the Road, Which to discover we must travel too.
14. What does the text of Quatrain LXV reveal about Omar Khayyam's opinion about the writings of prophets and religious texts? The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd Who rose before us, and as Prophet's burn'd Are all but stories, which, awoke from Sleep They told their comrades, and to sleep return'd.
15. Explain the symbolism of the sky in Quatrain LXXII: And that inverted bowl they call the sky, Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die, Lift not your hands to It for help – for It As impotently moves as you or I.
16. Explain how the metaphors used in Quatrain LXXIV give insight into the poet's thoughts on fatalism: YESTERDAY This Day's Madness did prepare;  
TO-MORROW'S Silence, Triumph, or Despair:  
Drink! For you know not whence you came, nor why!  
Drink! For you know not why you go, nor where.
17. In Quatrain LXXVII, the poet uses the metaphors of a tavern and a temple. What do these represent? And this I know: whether the one True Light  
Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume me quite,  
One flash of it within the Tavern caught  
Better than in the Temple lost outright.

18. In Quatrain LXXXIII through XC, what do the pots symbolize?

19. Explain the sentiments of the "Vessel of a more ungainly Make" described in Quatrain LXXXVI:

After a momentary silence spake

Some Vessel of a more ungainly make;

"They sneer at me for leaning all awry:

What! Did the Hand then of the Potter shake?"

20. In Quatrain LXXXVII, the pot asks "Who is the Potter, pray, and who the pot? What did the poet mean by this question?"

21. Who is the "Stern Recorder" mentioned in Quatrain XCVIII?

## The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

### I.

WAKE! For the Sun, who scatter'd into flight  
The Stars before him from the Field of Night,  
Drives Night along with them from Heav'n, and strikes  
The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light.

### II.

Before the phantom of False morning died,  
Methought a Voice within the Tavern cried,  
"When all the Temple is prepared within,  
"Why nods the drowsy Worshiper outside?"

### III.

And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before  
The Tavern shouted--"Open then the Door!  
"You know how little while we have to stay,  
And, once departed, may return no more."

### IV.

Now the New Year reviving old Desires,  
The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,  
Where the WHITE HAND OF MOSES on the Bough  
Puts out, and Jesus from the Ground suspires.

### V.

Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,  
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no one knows;  
But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,  
And many a Garden by the Water blows.

### VI.

And David's lips are lockt; but in divine  
High-piping Pehlevi, with "Wine! Wine! Wine!  
"Red Wine!"--the Nightingale cries to the Rose  
That sallow cheek of hers to' incarnadine.

VII.

Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring  
Your Winter garment of Repentance fling:  
The Bird of Time has but a little way  
To flutter--and the Bird is on the Wing.

VIII.

Whether at Naishapur or Babylon,  
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,  
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,  
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.

IX.

Each Morn a thousand Roses brings, you say:  
Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?  
And this first Summer month that brings the Rose  
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobad away.

X.

Well, let it take them! What have we to do  
With Kaikobad the Great, or Kaikhosru?  
Let Zal and Rustum bluster as they will,  
Or Hatim call to Supper--heed not you.

XI.

With me along the strip of Herbage strown  
That just divides the desert from the sown,  
Where name of Slave and Sultan is forgot--  
And Peace to Mahmud on his golden Throne!

XII.

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread--and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness--  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

XIII.

Some for the Glories of This World; and some  
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;  
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,  
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

XIV.

Look to the blowing Rose about us--"Lo,  
Laughing," she says, "into the world I blow,  
At once the silken tassel of my Purse  
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw."

XV.

And those who husbanded the Golden grain,  
And those who flung it to the winds like Rain,  
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd  
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

XVI.

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon  
Turns Ashes--or it prospers; and anon,  
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,  
Lighting a little hour or two--is gone.

XVII.

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai  
Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,  
How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp  
Abode his destined Hour, and went his way.

XVIII.

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
The courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:  
And Bahram, that great Hunter--the Wild Ass  
Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.

XIX.

I sometimes think that never blows so red  
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;  
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears  
Dropt in her Lap from some once lovely Head.

XX.

And this reviving Herb whose tender Green  
Fledges the River-Lip on which we lean--  
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows  
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen!

XXI.

Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears  
TO-DAY of past Regrets and future Fears:  
To-morrow--Why, To-morrow I may be  
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Years.

XXII.

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best  
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,  
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,  
And one by one crept silently to rest.

XXIII.

And we, that now make merry in the Room  
They left, and Summer dresses in new bloom,  
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth  
Descend--ourselves to make a Couch--for whom?

XXIV.

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,  
Before we too into the Dust descend;  
Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie,  
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and--sans End!

XXV.

Alike for those who for TO-DAY prepare,  
And those that after some TO-MORROW stare,  
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries,  
"Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There."

XXVI.

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd  
Of the Two Worlds so wisely--they are thrust  
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn  
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

XXVII.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about: but evermore  
Came out by the same door where in I went.

XXVIII.

With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,  
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;  
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd--  
"I came like Water, and like Wind I go."

XXIX.

Into this Universe, and Why not knowing  
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing;  
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,  
I know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing.

XXX.

What, without asking, hither hurried Whence?  
And, without asking, Whither hurried hence!  
Oh, many a Cup of this forbidden Wine  
Must drown the memory of that insolence!

XXXI.

Up from Earth's Center through the Seventh Gate  
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,  
And many a Knot unravel'd by the Road;  
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate.

XXXII.

There was the Door to which I found no Key;  
There was the Veil through which I might not see:  
Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE  
There was--and then no more of THEE and ME.

XXXIII.

Earth could not answer; nor the Seas that mourn  
In flowing Purple, of their Lord Forlorn;  
Nor rolling Heaven, with all his Signs reveal'd  
And hidden by the sleeve of Night and Morn.

XXXIV.

Then of the THEE IN ME who works behind  
The Veil, I lifted up my hands to find  
A lamp amid the Darkness; and I heard,  
As from Without--"THE ME WITHIN THEE BLIND!"

XXXV.

Then to the Lip of this poor earthen Urn  
I lean'd, the Secret of my Life to learn:  
And Lip to Lip it murmur'd--"While you live,  
"Drink!--for, once dead, you never shall return."

XXXVI.

I think the Vessel, that with fugitive  
Articulation answer'd, once did live,  
And drink; and Ah! the passive Lip I kiss'd,  
How many Kisses might it take--and give!



XXXVII.

For I remember stopping by the way  
To watch a Potter thumping his wet Clay:  
And with its all-obliterated Tongue  
It murmur'd--"Gently, Brother, gently, pray!"

XXXVIII.

And has not such a Story from of Old  
Down Man's successive generations roll'd  
Of such a clod of saturated Earth  
Cast by the Maker into Human mold?

XXXIX.

And not a drop that from our Cups we throw  
For Earth to drink of, but may steal below  
To quench the fire of Anguish in some Eye  
There hidden--far beneath, and long ago.

XL.

As then the Tulip for her morning sup  
Of Heav'nly Vintage from the soil looks up,  
Do you devoutly do the like, till Heav'n  
To Earth invert you--like an empty Cup.

XLI.

Perplext no more with Human or Divine,  
To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign,  
And lose your fingers in the tresses of  
The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine.

XLII.

And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press,  
End in what All begins and ends in--Yes;  
Think then you are TO-DAY what YESTERDAY  
You were--TO-MORROW you shall not be less.

XLIII.

So when that Angel of the darker Drink  
At last shall find you by the river-brink,  
And, offering his Cup, invite your Soul  
Forth to your Lips to quaff--you shall not shrink.

XLIV.

Why, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,  
And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,  
Were't not a Shame--were't not a Shame for him  
In this clay carcass crippled to abide?

XLV.

'Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest  
A Sultan to the realm of Death addrest;  
The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrash  
Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest.

XLVI.

And fear not lest Existence closing your  
Account, and mine, should know the like no more;  
The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has pour'd  
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour.

XLVII.

When You and I behind the Veil are past,  
Oh, but the long, long while the World shall last,  
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds  
As the Sea's self should heed a pebble-cast.

XLVIII.

A Moment's Halt--a momentary taste  
Of BEING from the Well amid the Waste--  
And Lo!--the phantom Caravan has reach'd  
The NOTHING it set out from--Oh, make haste!

XLIX.

Would you that spangle of Existence spend  
About THE SECRET--quick about it, Friend!  
A Hair perhaps divides the False from True--  
And upon what, prithee, may life depend?

L.

A Hair perhaps divides the False and True;  
Yes; and a single Alif were the clue--  
Could you but find it--to the Treasure-house,  
And peradventure to THE MASTER too;

LI.

Whose secret Presence through Creation's veins  
Running Quicksilver-like eludes your pains;  
Taking all shapes from Mah to Mahi and  
They change and perish all--but He remains;

LII.

A moment guessed--then back behind the Fold  
Immerst of Darkness round the Drama roll'd  
Which, for the Pastime of Eternity,  
He doth Himself contrive, enact, behold.

LIII.

But if in vain, down on the stubborn floor  
Of Earth, and up to Heav'n's unopening Door,  
You gaze TO-DAY, while You are You--how then  
TO-MORROW, when You shall be You no more?

LIV.

Waste not your Hour, nor in the vain pursuit  
Of This and That endeavor and dispute;  
Better be jocund with the fruitful Grape  
Than sadden after none, or bitter, Fruit.

LV.

You know, my Friends, with what a brave Carouse  
I made a Second Marriage in my house;  
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,  
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

LVI.

For "Is" and "Is-not" though with Rule and Line  
And "UP-AND-DOWN" by Logic I define,  
Of all that one should care to fathom, I  
was never deep in anything but--Wine.

LVII.

Ah, by my Computations, People say,  
Reduce the Year to better reckoning?--Nay,  
'Twas only striking from the Calendar  
Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday.

LVIII.

And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,  
Came shining through the Dusk an Angel Shape  
Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder; and  
He bid me taste of it; and 'twas--the Grape!

LIX.

The Grape that can with Logic absolute  
The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute:  
The sovereign Alchemist that in a trice  
Life's leaden metal into Gold transmute;

LX.

The mighty Mahmud, Allah-breathing Lord,  
That all the misbelieving and black Horde  
Of Fears and Sorrows that infest the Soul  
Scatters before him with his whirlwind Sword.

LXI.

Why, be this Juice the growth of God, who dare  
BlaspHEME the twisted tendril as a Snare?  
A Blessing, we should use it, should we not?  
And if a Curse--why, then, Who set it there?

LXII.

I must abjure the Balm of Life, I must,  
Scared by some After-reckoning ta'en on trust,  
Or lured with Hope of some Diviner Drink,  
To fill the Cup--when crumbled into Dust!

LXIII.

Of threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!  
One thing at least is certain--This Life flies;  
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;  
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

LXIV.

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who  
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,  
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,  
Which to discover we must travel too.

LXV.

The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd  
Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn'd,  
Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep  
They told their comrades, and to Sleep return'd.

LXVI.

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,  
Some letter of that After-life to spell:  
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,  
And answer'd "I Myself am Heav'n and Hell:"

LXVII.

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,  
And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on fire,  
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,  
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

LXVIII.

We are no other than a moving row  
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go  
Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held  
In Midnight by the Master of the Show;

LXIX.

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays  
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;  
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,  
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

LXX.

The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,  
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;  
And He that toss'd you down into the Field,  
He knows about it all--HE knows--HE knows!

LXXI.

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

LXXII.

And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,  
Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,  
Lift not your hands to It for help--for It  
As impotently moves as you or I.

LXXIII.

With Earth's first Clay They did the Last Man knead,  
And there of the Last Harvest sow'd the Seed:  
And the first Morning of Creation wrote  
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

LXXIV.

YESTERDAY This Day's Madness did prepare;  
TO-MORROW's Silence, Triumph, or Despair:  
Drink! for you not know whence you came, nor why:  
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

LXXV.

I tell you this--When, started from the Goal,  
Over the flaming shoulders of the Foal  
Of Heav'n Parwin and Mushtari they flung,  
In my predestined Plot of Dust and Soul.

LXXVI.

The Vine had struck a fiber: which about  
It clings my Being--let the Dervish flout;  
Of my Base metal may be filed a Key  
That shall unlock the Door he howls without.

LXXVII.

And this I know: whether the one True Light  
Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume me quite,  
One Flash of It within the Tavern caught  
Better than in the Temple lost outright.

LXXVIII.

What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke  
A conscious Something to resent the yoke  
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain  
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

LXXIX.

What! from his helpless Creature be repaid  
Pure Gold for what he lent him dross-allay'd--  
Sue for a Debt he never did contract,  
And cannot answer--Oh the sorry trade!

LXXX.

Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin  
Beset the Road I was to wander in,  
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round  
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!

LXXXI.

Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,  
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:  
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man  
Is blacken'd--Man's forgiveness give--and take!

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LXXXII.

As under cover of departing Day  
Slunk hunger-stricken Ramazan away,  
Once more within the Potter's house alone  
I stood, surrounded by the Shapes of Clay.

LXXXIII.

Shapes of all Sorts and Sizes, great and small,  
That stood along the floor and by the wall;  
And some loquacious Vessels were; and some  
Listen'd perhaps, but never talk'd at all.

LXXXIV.

Said one among them--"Surely not in vain  
My substance of the common Earth was ta'en  
And to this Figure molded, to be broke,  
Or trampled back to shapeless Earth again."



LXXXV.

Then said a Second--"Ne'er a peevish Boy  
Would break the Bowl from which he drank in joy;  
And He that with his hand the Vessel made  
Will surely not in after Wrath destroy."

LXXXVI.

After a momentary silence spake  
Some Vessel of a more ungainly Make;  
"They sneer at me for leaning all awry:  
What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?"

LXXXVII.

Whereat some one of the loquacious Lot--  
I think a Sufi pipkin--waxing hot--  
"All this of Pot and Potter--Tell me then,  
Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?"

LXXXVIII.

"Why," said another, "Some there are who tell  
Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell  
The luckless Pots he marr'd in making--Pish!  
He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well."

LXXXIX.

"Well," murmured one, "Let whoso make or buy,  
My Clay with long Oblivion is gone dry:  
But fill me with the old familiar Juice,  
Methinks I might recover by and by."

XC.

So while the Vessels one by one were speaking,  
The little Moon look'd in that all were seeking:  
And then they jogg'd each other, "Brother! Brother!  
Now for the Porter's shoulders' knot a-creaking!"

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XCI.

Ah, with the Grape my fading life provide,  
And wash the Body whence the Life has died,  
And lay me, shrouded in the living Leaf,  
By some not unfrequented Garden-side.

XCII.

That ev'n buried Ashes such a snare  
Of Vintage shall fling up into the Air  
As not a True-believer passing by  
But shall be overtaken unaware.

XCIII.

Indeed the Idols I have loved so long  
Have done my credit in this World much wrong:  
Have drown'd my Glory in a shallow Cup,  
And sold my reputation for a Song.

XCIV.

Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before  
I swore--but was I sober when I swore?  
And then and then came Spring, and Rose-in-hand  
My thread-bare Penitence apieces tore.

XCV.

And much as Wine has play'd the Infidel,  
And robb'd me of my Robe of Honor--Well,  
I wonder often what the Vintners buy  
One half so precious as the stuff they sell.

XCVI.

Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!  
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!  
The Nightingale that in the branches sang,  
Ah whence, and whither flown again, who knows!

XCVII.

Would but the Desert of the Fountain yield  
One glimpse--if dimly, yet indeed, reveal'd,  
To which the fainting Traveler might spring,  
As springs the trampled herbage of the field!

XCVIII.

Would but some winged Angel ere too late  
Arrest the yet unfolded Roll of Fate,  
And make the stern Recorder otherwise  
Enregister, or quite obliterate!

XCIX.

Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits--and then  
Re-mold it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

C.

Yon rising Moon that looks for us again--  
How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;  
How oft hereafter rising look for us  
Through this same Garden--and for one in vain!

CI.

And when like her, oh Saki, you shall pass  
Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass,  
And in your joyous errand reach the spot  
Where I made One--turn down an empty Glass!

TAMAM.

## Vocabulary for

### *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

abide – to remain; continue; stay  
abjure – to renounce, repudiate, or retract  
abode – residence; dwelling; habitation; home  
absolute – free from imperfection; complete; perfect  
after-reckoning - judgment at a later time  
agape - open  
alchemist – a person who seeks to use chemical or magical means to change base metals into gold  
alif – the first letter in the Arabic alphabet  
Allah – the name given to God in the Muslim religion  
anguish – acute distress, suffering, or pain  
anon - shortly; soon  
apieces – in separate pieces  
articulation - speech  
aureate – golden or gilded  
awry - crooked  
ayes -yeses  
Babylon – an ancient city located in present day Iraq, noted for its magnificence and culture  
Bahram - a king (AD 420-438) in the Sassanian dynasty of ancient Iran renowned for his skill at hunting  
balm – a healing or soothing ointment  
base metal – non-precious metals such as lead or iron  
baser – more common  
behold – look; see  
blaspheme – to make a statement offensive to God  
bluster – to be loud, noisy, or swaggering  
bough – the limb of a tree  
brink - edge  
caravan – a group of travelers or merchants that band together for mutual protection, usually traveling in the desert by camel.  
caravanserai – a large in enclosing a courtyard providing a place of accommodation for a caravan  
carouse – to engage in a drunken revel; to drink deeply and frequently  
cast - thrown  
checks – to stop or arrest motion suddenly or forcefully; in chess – to make a move that puts the opponent’s king under direct attack

chequer-board - chessboard  
clings - adheres closely to; sticks to  
clod - clump  
cock – a male chicken  
common - ordinary  
computations - calculations  
comrades - companions  
confute – to prove to be false  
conscious – aware; knowing  
conspire – to plot together  
contract – to formally agree to a set of conditions  
contrive – to plan cleverly; plot; devise; invent  
coop'd - cooped  
crept – moved silently or stealthily  
crew - crowded  
cypress – an evergreen coniferous tree having dark green foliage and rough bark  
dervish – a member of a Muslim acetic order, such as the Sufis  
despair – loss of hope  
destined - fated  
devise – invent or contrive  
devout - faithful; pious  
dispute - argue  
divine – heavenly or godly in nature  
doth - does  
dross-allayed  
eludes – evades capture; escapes  
emerged – came forth into view or notice  
enact – to put into effect as a law or rule  
endeavor – pursuit or action  
enmesh – trap or ensnare  
enregister – to write permanently  
entire - whole  
expire - die  
fainting – exhausted; unsteady  
fathom - understand  
Ferrash - A class of servant whose duties included management of the tents  
fledges - feathers  
fling - throw  
flout – to treat with scorn or disdain  
Foal of Heaven – birth of heaven  
forlorn – destitute; bereft

frequent – often attend  
fugitive - fleeing  
gin - an alcoholic beverage distilled from grain mash and  
flavored with berries  
glimpse - sight  
halt - stop  
Hatim –a well-known Oriental generosity, perhaps a meal  
heed – pay attention to  
herbage - plants  
hither – to or toward this place  
horde – an undisciplined mass  
husbanded – tended; raised  
hyacinth – a plant of the lily family cultivated for its fragrant  
flowers  
idols – statues representing gods  
illumined - lit  
immerst – immersed; submerged in  
impotently – lacking in power of ability  
impute – to attribute to or charge with  
incarnadine – blood-like or red  
infest – to live in or inhabit to an unwanted degree  
infidel – a non-believer  
insolence – contemptuously rude speech or behavior  
invert – to turn upside down or inside out  
Iram - A garden planted by King Shaddád, and now sunk  
somewhere in the Sands of Arabia  
Jamshyd – the fourth and greatest king of Pishdadian Dynasty  
Jamshyd’s Seven Ring’d Cup – a divining cup, used to fortell  
the future  
jarring - conflicting  
jocund – cheerful; merry  
jogg'd - jostled  
Kaikhosru – a mythical king  
Kaikobad – a historical Persian King  
kindle - light  
knead – to work clay into a uniform mixture by pressing,  
folding, and stretching  
leaden – heavy; common  
lent – temporarily gave the use of  
loquacious - talkative  
lot – the portion in life assigned by fate or providence  
luckless - unlucky  
lured – attract or entice  
mah to mahi – from fish to moon

Mahmud - The sultan, often surnamed in English the Great, who extended the Persian empire into India.  
manuscript – an original text or written work  
marr'd - marred  
methinks – I think  
methought – I thought  
minister – a person appointed by a ruling authority placed in charge of some aspect of a government  
momentary - quick  
muezzin – a Muslim crier who calls the faithful to prayer from a tower or minaret  
murmer'd - murmured  
Mushtari – the planet Jupiter  
myriads – countless numbers  
Naishapur – a region of Persia where Omar Khayyam was born  
nightingale – a small bird of the thrush family noted for its melodious song  
noes – no's  
obliterated – removed or destroyed  
oblivion – a state of being forgotten or removed  
oft - often  
outright – complete or total  
Parwin – the constellation Pleiades  
passive - unresisting  
pastime – a pleasant means of recreation or amusement  
peevish – fretful or cross  
Pehlevi – an ancient, heroic form of the Sanskrit language used in Persia  
penalties – punishments  
penitence – a state of being sorry for past sins or transgressions  
peradventure – chance, doubt, or uncertainty  
perish – to be destroyed; die  
perplex – bewilder; puzzle  
phantom – an elusive ghost  
piety - godliness  
pipkin – a small earthen pot  
pish – an exclamation of disbelief  
pitfall - trap  
plot – course or pathway  
pomp – a splendid or stately display  
portal - doorway  
porter - carrier

potter – one who makes pots from clay  
pray – to make earnest petition  
predestined – ordained ahead of time  
prithiee – pray thee; please  
provoke – stir up; call forth  
pursuit – any occupation or pastime  
quaff - drink  
quatrain – a stanza or poem of four lines, usually with alternate rhymes  
quench – to slake; satisfy; allay  
quicksilver - mercury  
Ramazan – the daily fast that Muslims practice during the month of Ramadan (the ninth month in the Muslim calendar). The fast is rigidly observed from sunrise to sunset.  
reckoning – a settlement of accounts; appraisal or judgment  
recorder – one who keeps written record of  
repentance – regret for a past action; deep sorrow for past sins  
resign - surrender  
retires - retreats  
revelations – things revealed  
Rubaiyat – quatrains of Persian poetry  
Rustum – the “Hercules” of Persian Mythology  
sage – a wise person  
saki – wine made from rice  
sallow – of a sickly, yellowish color; jaundiced  
sans - without  
sate - satisfy  
saturated – filled to capacity  
scheme – scheme or layout  
scorn - contempt  
senseless – unorganized; making no sense  
shrouded - covered or hidden; shrouded  
slunk – snuck away in a cowardly fashion  
snare - trap  
sneer – to twist the face in a manner to show scorn or contempt  
sober – not drunk; clear-headed  
solitude – a state of being alone  
sovereign – ruling; of the highest degree  
sow'd – sowed; planted  
sown - planted  
spake - spoke  
spangle – decorated with bright objects



spouse - wife  
stopt - stopped  
strown - thrown  
stubborn - unyielding  
substance – the material from which a thing is made  
successive – occurring one after another  
sue – use the law to force another to comply  
Sufi – a Muslim mystic  
Sultan – An Islamic Ruler  
sup - eat  
suspairs – sighs or breathes  
tamam – it is ended  
tavern – a public house where strong drink is served  
temple – a structure dedicated to worship  
tendrill – a shoot or sprout of a plant that has the ability to entangle  
thither - there  
thread-bare - worn  
Throne of Saturn – seat of the Lord of the Seventh Heaven  
trampled – walked upon  
transmute – to change into  
tresses – locks of hair  
trice – a very short time  
triumph - victory  
tulip – a flower or bulb having bright, cup-shaped blooms  
turret - tower or minaret  
unfrequented – not often visited  
ungainly – awkward; not graceful  
unpermitted – not allowed; banned  
urn - vase  
vain – ineffectual or unsuccessful  
vessel - container  
vintage - wine  
vintners – wine makers  
wane – to decrease  
waste - wilderness  
wax – to increase  
waxing - increasing  
whereat – at which; whereupon  
whereunder – under which  
wherewith – because of which  
whirlwind - tornado  
whither - where

whoso - whoever

willy-nilly – in a disorganized or unplanned manner

wit – mental ability

wrath – extreme anger

writ - wrote

wrought - made

yoke – a means of oppression or enslavement

Zal – the father of Rostum