

Meditations with Hafiz

Rev. Amy Freedman and Lee Whittaker
Channing Memorial Church
August 16, 2009

Reflections before the Service:

*We have all come to the right place.
We all sit in God's classroom.
Now, the only thing left for us to do, my dear,
Is to stop throwing spitballs for a while.*

O wondrous creature by what strange miracle do you so often not smile?
—Hafiz (1315-1390)

READING: *Beautiful Empty Pages*, Hafiz translated by Daniel Ladinsky

What kind of work
Can I do in this world?

Who would be kind enough
To hire an old holy Bum,

One with a great reputation
For loving the charms
Of the lawless
And the wild artists and the lewd?

Maybe I could become a poet.

Maybe the Beloved
Will make my love so Pure

That he will come to sit upon
All my beautiful pages.

And when you come to look at them,

He might kick you
With His Beautiful Divine Foot.

REFLECTION: *Meditations with Hafiz*, Rev. Amy Freedman

How many of you have heard of Hafiz (half-ez)?

How many of you have heard of Rumi?

I am not surprised. Both are Persian poets in the Sufi mystical tradition. Rumi lived a century before and his works informed Hafiz. Although Rumi is much better known in the West, Hafiz is the most beloved poet in Iran where his works outsell that of Rumi and even the Koran. In some ways he is like the Persian Shakespeare, a master word-smith whose verses continue to shed light on the human condition. However unlike the Bard whose authorship is called into question, Hafiz is a lively spiritual companion. Many recite and sing his poems not as classical literature but as a pathway to divine illumination. Some use his poetry as an oracle, posing a question and then opening the Divan or complete works for spiritual direction. His mausoleum is one of the most important monuments in Shiraz.

So why is Hafiz virtually unknown to Westerners when he continues to inspire so many in modern day Persia? The answer is simple. Something was lost in translation. What is so amazing about Hafiz and why the analogy to Shakespeare is apt, is that in the original Persian, his words have multiple layers of meaning. Also, he wrote in a poetic form called ghazal (“guzzle”) which is an ode or song of rhymed couplets. Often in trying to capture the rhythm of the language or to rhyme in English, the passion and meaning of the poetry has been significantly weakened.

All of the passages used in today’s service come from Daniel Ladinsky who has published several books and even a CD of Hafiz works. As he does not know Persian, Ladinsky does not claim to offer “translations;” his books are subtitled “Renderings of Hafiz”. He offers Westerners not a literal translation of the text or a recreation of the meter but a rendering of the poem’s spirit complete with emotion, humor, and insight. Ladinsky did this with the guidance of Avatar Meher Baba, a modern spiritual teacher with whom he studied in India for many years.

So, who is this “holy bum” as the poet calls himself? Shams-ud-din Muhammad was born in Shiraz, city of roses and nightingales sometime around 1320 AD. To give you a sense of the historical period, his lifetime mirrors that of Chaucer. Even though he

was poor and served as an apprentice to a baker, he proved himself as a scholar at an early age excelling in memorization and calligraphy.

“Hafez” means “memorizer”, a title given to those who memorize the Koran in its entirety. Can you imagine knowing an entire holy text by heart? The ability to recite scripture from memory is a way to be a channel of the Divine. A Hafez spends years not only memorizing but perfecting the recitation of all thirty chapters of the Koran. As if this was not accomplishment enough, Hafiz did more than memorize the Koran and other great Persian poets, with the guidance of his spiritual teacher, Hafiz is said to have attained “Cosmic Consciousness” or “God-realization.”

I do not know about you, but this idea of attaining “Cosmic Consciousness” or “God-realization” conjures in my mind the image of someone with a holier-than-thou attitude. Someone with his head in the clouds, removed from the challenges of living and above earthly pleasures. One of the reasons that Hafiz is cherished as a spiritual companion to this day is because he is quite human. He understands the bereavement of losing loved ones—his father died when he was a boy and both his wife and only child passed away. Hafiz recognizes the struggles of life that can keep us from realizing our true nature. Unlike the dualism of some religious traditions that uphold the spirit as holy and the body as evil, Hafiz relishes the pleasures of the body as a manifestation of the sacred.

Likewise, Hafiz continually celebrates God’s Love. His name for Allah is the Beloved. Instead of a judge, God is a kind loving presence who longs for our happiness if we only get out of the way. The Reflection before the service reminds us, *We have all come to the right place. We all sit in God’s classroom.*

Now, the only thing left for us to do, my dear, Is to stop throwing spitballs for a while.

RESPONSIVE READING #607, ***Beloved Presence***, Hafiz

REFLECTION, Lee Whittaker

We live in difficult times. Today many of us are burdened with problems. Often what happens to us is that we become myopic and see only our problems and situations. We lose sight of all that is around us. We lose our connection with our daily life, with others, and the universe and we often feel alone, tired and withdrawn.

I was going through a tough time one summer and a very wise friend suggested to me to go out and “re-create”. She said go out and “re-create” my connection with my world. Now of course I looked at her as if she had four heads. I even found her suggestion annoying. I was looking for some solid answers to ease my burden. Going out to “re-create” my connection with the universe wasn’t the answer I was looking for. At this point in my life I lived by the beach. She knew my resistance to this idea, but encouraged me to go to the beach and really experience it. Allow myself to be present in the moment and to see and feel all that the beach had to offer. I did so, quite begrudgingly, only because nothing else seemed to be helping. I remember going down to the beach late afternoon. I allowed myself to feel the hot sand on my feet and then the cool, soothing soft, wet sand of the shoreline. I felt the strength of the waves as the tide was coming in. I listened to the waves crashing and felt the cool spray on my face. I stood still and felt my feet slowly sinking into the sand as the waves rushed around me. Despite the strength of the waves, my feet were firmly planted in the sand. I felt completely rooted in the earth. Oh...did I say that? Yes I got it. While I got no answers to my life situations, I did get a peace that I didn’t have before. I received this tangible sign that there is a life energy around me that will keep me rooted, growing and thriving. Even if I uproot my feet from that place, I will be rooted again. I felt alive and rejuvenated and cared for. The heaviness of my burden was magically lifted.

One of my favorite lines is from John Lennon where he says “life is what happens to you while you’re making other plans”. Every day mountains change, flowers bloom, the sky changes, kids grow up, our friends get older...this is all part life that we often don’t pay attention to. We take it for granted. There is a life force that is around us every minute of every day. Sensing the awe at the wonder of life and feeling in relation with all things whether you believe in a Divine Being or not is an experience of spirituality. Seeing and experiencing the handiwork of the universe whether it be a walk along the beach, looking at the clouds, enjoying some flowers, strolling through the woods, spending time with kids at their level, playing with your pets, seeing an old friend, feeling the warm, supporting embrace of a loved one is a form of re-creating ones connection to the universe and to that energy. If that universal life energy can do things like carve the

Grand Canyon, or create the beautiful shorelines of Newport, it can surely help each of us grow through our situations. Recreate, enjoy and relish in the artistry, the magic and the power of the universal life energy. Go out and play!

READING, *Silence*, Hafiz, translated by Daniel Ladinsky

A day of Silence
Can be a pilgrimage in itself.

A day of Silence
Can help you listen
To the Soul play
Its marvelous lute and drum.

Is not most talking
A Crazy defense of a crumbling fort?

I thought we came here
To surrender in Silence,

To yield to Light and Happiness,

To Dance within
In celebration of Love's Victory!

MEDITATION:

I now invite everyone into a time of spoken and silent meditation. Place your feet on the floor, place your hands on your lap. Take a deep breath and let it out with a sigh. If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes or allow your gaze to soften, awaken a deeper consciousness with these words by Hafiz (translated by Daniel Ladinsky) followed by a time of shared silence.

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."

Awake awhile.
 It does not have to be
 Forever,
 Right Now.

READING Hafiz Words, translated by Daniel Ladinsky

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!

REFLECTION, Rev. Amy Freedman

No, Hafiz is not some aloof holier-than-thou saint! I picture him like Leo Buscaglia. You know the popular therapist and lecturer with a beard who spoke about the power of Love on public television in the seventies and eighties? I picture Hafiz like Buscaglia slightly unkempt, glowing with enthusiasm and just ready to give you a big bear hug. Perhaps you know someone like this whose outlook is so positive that you simply feel better in their presence.

If the Great Ones, all the spiritual teachers of various traditions are correct and Love is the “energizing elixir” of the Universe then how is it that we experience so much resentment and loneliness in our every day lives? Could it be as simple as Hafiz suggests—that we’re spiritually dehydrated? With all of our busyness and serious responsibilities, we neglect the most essential activity of life, drinking and serving Love? What if this ancient sage is not crazy? He could be right that “All a sane [person] can ever care about is giving Love”.

In the week ahead, notice when you feel cranky and judgmental and consider if you have taken time for Love. Unlike water, Love is free and readily available. You will find it in your own heart and all around you. You will find it when you smile at a stranger, breathe in the fresh air, give thanks for the gifts of food that sustain your body, and soak in the energy of the sun. Remember that simple song... “Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away, Love is something if you give it away, you keep on having more”

RECITATION:

I want both of us
To start talking about this great love

As if you, I, and the Sun were all married
And living in a tiny room,

Helping each other to cook,
Do the wash,
Weave and sew,
Care for our beautiful
Animals.

We all leave each morning
To labor on the earth's field.
No one does not lift a great pack.

I want both of us to start singing like two
Travelling minstrels
About this extraordinary existence
We share,

As if
You, I, and God were all married

And living in
A tiny
Room.

*BENEDICTION, *Circles* (adapted), Hafiz, translated by Daniel Ladinsky

The moon is most happy
When it is full.

The sun always looks
Like a perfectly minted coin.

So many varieties of fruit
Hang plump and round.

I have gotten the hint.

There is something about Circles
The Beloved likes.

We are
Within the Circle of a Perfect One,
an Infinite Community of Light.

Go in peace, Go in Love, Go Forth and Bless the World.