

Hafiz the Poet

Some of you may have heard me wax eloquent about a new book of poetry that I have come across called, "I Heard God Laughing." It is a rendering into English of the work of the 14th Century Persian Sufi poet Hafiz. The master poet Hafiz is probably as well known in Iran as Shakespeare is to most of us. His poems are entirely about his love affair with God. As the title suggests there is more than a bit of humour in them and an earthiness that might have some of the more prudish among us blush. Despite that I love them.

The Sufi tradition represents the mystical side of Islam and has down through the centuries been a tradition that has been viewed with suspicion by orthodox Sunni and Shiite alike. It makes much of imagery and has less to do with creedal pronouncements. So poetry and dancing are ideal vehicles for expressing one's religious faith in this form of religion. The Whirling Dervishes are Sufi.

Now lest you might assume that my upcoming trip to Turkey might have me converting to Islam, I have to say that my admiration of Sufi poetry has more to do with my love of the very strong mystical tradition that has been present in Christianity. Christians like Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross are being rediscovered as modern day Christians seek a deeper understanding of the overflowing love of God. Like their counterparts in Islam, Christian mystics have also been viewed with suspicion, because of the intensity of their relation with their Creator.

As I See It such art forms as poetry, song and dance are far better mediums for expressing our love and devotion to God – so let me share with a poem or two from Hafiz, and just maybe you'll get why I value them so highly.

***Spill the oil lamp!
Set this dry boring place on fire!
If you have ever
Made wanton love with God,
Then you have ignited that brilliant Light inside
That every person needs.***

So –

Spill the oil!

***Manic Screaming
We should make all spiritual talk
Simple today.
God is trying to sell you something,
But you don't want to buy.
That is what your suffering is:
Your fantastic haggling,
Your manic screaming over the price!***

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article with anyone who wants to.

Rev Tony Duncan

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