

**Elements of Literature and Creative Communication**  
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**Lecture - 27**  
**Hafez: The Poet for Life**

Hi there, welcome to our 27th lecture. Let us quickly recall what we did in the last class. We began with the concept of world literature because we premised it on the fact that before we come to terms with contemporary global poetry we need to come to terms with the concept of world literature as such. And we trace the concept and the word back to Goethe and how it was first introduced in 1827 during Goethe's interaction with his friend Eckermann and all that. And from there we move moved on to understanding the concept of world literature as defined by David Damrosch, a contemporary scholar professor of world literature at Harvard University. We also began understanding the pros and cons of work entering and becoming a part of world literature. And what are the processes through which a literary work enters the global market and becomes part of world literature? And how Rabindranath Tagore, as early as 1903, proposed the idea that literature is one organic whole rather than looking at it in a piece piecemeal manner as literature of this particular nation literature of that particular nation and all that, we need to consider literature as one whole organic unit. And how that kind of a concept was also backed by Marx and Engels and how they looked at their entire manifesto as probably the first prototype of world literature. We also discussed some of the valid concerns related to world literature and what happens what are the losses when particular regional work enters the portal of world literature and all that. Nevertheless, we also understood the global imperative to keep those concerns and offset those problems with the strengths of world literature and that is the reason why we said we need to go ahead with translation and world literature. In this class, we are going to discuss one remarkable poet. Thanks of course, to translation and thanks also to the concept of world literature otherwise, of course, such a remarkable voice, and such a poetic genius, there was no chance at all for that voice to be heard across the globe and it was a pity for us. Else, we would be deprived of listening to the great literary voice. Therefore, we are beginning with our discussion of one of the first one of the finest poets who is available to us through English translation and who is also a major part of world literature. Before we move on to the poet I want you to consider a few lines when you are lonely when you feel depressed when you feel there is no one around


you just think of these lines and then let us see how you respond to them and afterwards we move on to the poet. If you are ready let's go and see some of these lines.

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**When you are lonely...**

I wish I could show you,  
when you are lonely  
or in darkness,  
the astonishing light  
of your own being

Ever since happiness  
heard your name,  
it has been running  
through the streets  
trying to find you.



O wondrous creatures!  
By what strange miracle,  
Do you so often  
Not smile!



I wish I could show you  
when you are lonely  
or in darkness  
the astonishing light  
of your own being.

Now, consider this you are lonely you feel as if there is nobody next to you, or you feel let down, that is when these words can become an extraordinary companion. What are these lines trying to tell you what are these lines trying to tell you? I wish I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness the astonishing light of your own being. We may not be able to see that, but once when we realize the kind of light that emanates from us. We may not be aware of that, but people who can see can spot extraordinary light emanating from us. And if that day comes if that moment comes where we can see that; that is when we lose the feeling that we are lonely and we begin enjoying our own company and live a beautiful life of a lifelong companionship with ourselves. So, the poem beautifully talks of establishing a beautiful rapport with ourselves once that happens, of course, no turning back right yeah look at another line.

Ever since happiness  
heard your name  
it has been running  
through the streets  
trying to find you.

In fact, here we are always crying saying that there is no happiness in our life, we are not happy this, and that it is the other way round, it is the other way round actually, it is not that we are in search of happiness, but happiness is also equally in search of us. Once we realize it our outlook toward life itself changes beautifully and dramatically. Ever since happiness heard your name it's been running through the streets trying to find you. It is trying to find you so, do not worry, in fact, you are also trying but more than you, happiness is also trying to find you, it will reach you do not worry in fact, more than you happiness is eager to find you. Such extraordinary optimism!

O wondrous creatures  
by what strange miracle  
do you not so often  
not smile.

Why is it that you do not smile.... when there is so much to smile around right. All the while we behave as if an entire planet has fallen on our heads. Usually, if there is a small mismatch here and there we feel the entire world has fallen on our heads. But now if we can develop a sense of proportion, or scale, in other words, the scale of consciousness then automatically you develop or we develop happiness. Now, look at this how big is the universe, how big is a solar system in that universe and how big is our planet in that universe and how big is our nation on this planet, how big is your village on this planet, how big is our family in this planet. Now, look at the proportion and if something among small things, if there is a mismatch here we start behaving as if the entire world has fallen on our shoulders. On the other hand just look around how beautifully the sun has been carrying out its duty, how seasons are changing how trees are working on their own beautifully. The moment we learn to connect with our surrounding the moment we learn to connect with our surroundings then the inverted curve becomes a beautiful curve and we start smiling.

After going through these lines would not you be interested in knowing who this great guy is who has made you realize so much about your own self? Of course, at least we have grown an inch taller because we have come to know so much about ourselves right that we did not know. So, would you be interested in knowing this guy who made you feel a little happier and a little taller?.

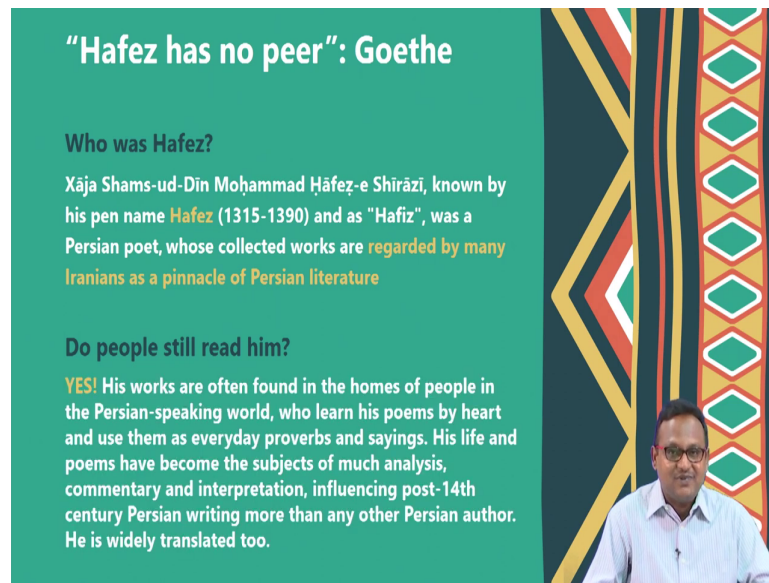
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Here comes the guy, we are discussing an extraordinary 14th-century poet who lived and wrote in Persia and today the world knows him as the 'poet for life' - Hafez, of course, there are different spellings to that name, Hafiz, Hafez and all that, but we are referring to the same guy. In fact, he comes a century later than Rumi, another mystic Sufi poet, but of course, you can see a continuation of the legacy that Rumi left behind in the poetry of Hafez. So, Hafez is the one who made us smile, who made us realize, that we are not alone in this universe sometime between 1350 and 1390 he lived in Persia.



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## "Hafez has no peer": Goethe

**Who was Hafez?**

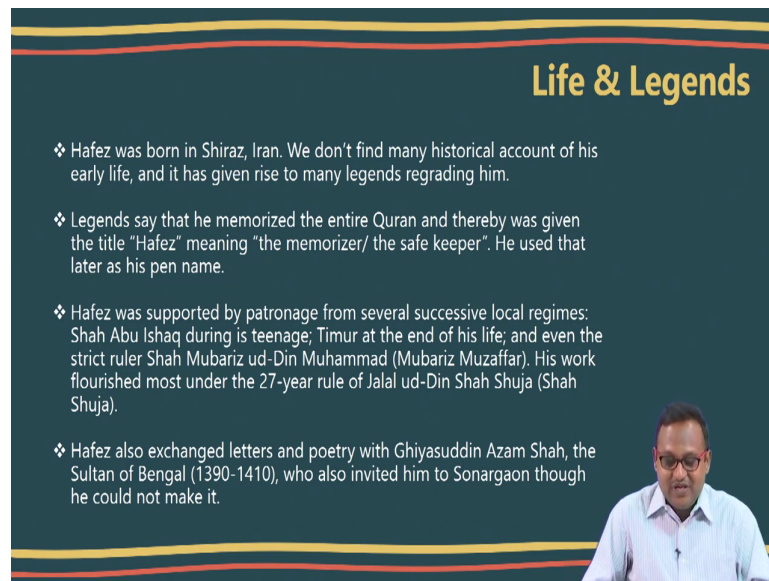
Xāja Shams-ud-Dīn Moḥammad Ḥāfeẓ-e Shirāzī, known by his pen name **Hafez** (1315-1390) and as "Hafiz", was a Persian poet, whose collected works are **regarded by many Iranians as a pinnacle of Persian literature**

**Do people still read him?**

**YES!** His works are often found in the homes of people in the Persian-speaking world, who learn his poems by heart and use them as everyday proverbs and sayings. His life and poems have become the subjects of much analysis, commentary and interpretation, influencing post-14th century Persian writing more than any other Persian author. He is widely translated too.

And in the last class, you remember I said Goethe's concept of world literature was greatly influenced or was triggered by his reading of Hafez, Kalidasa and Chinese novels. Hafez played a major role in fact, after having read Hafez that Goethe realized the importance of floating world literature which is why he went on to declare Hafez as having no peer there is nobody equal to Hafez, which is true in a sense. Who do you think Hafez was? Xaja Shams-ud-Din Mohammad Hafez-e Shirazi. Hafez is his pen name, he lived in the 14th-century, a Persian poet whose collected works are available to us of course, and whose works themselves constitute the pinnacle of Iranian culture. In fact, Persian culture gained a lot from the works of Hafez. The question comes when he lived in the fourteenth century do people still read him. Of course, do we not read Kalidasa? Do we not read Tulsidas? In fact, like Tulsidas, which is now a household name in India because we read *Ramcharitmanas* with folded hands, its acquired an iconic status. Similarly, people read Hafez in Iran and other places. And anybody who realizes the importance of Hafez will read, and not just people of Iran, but people throughout the globe including our Goethe, Tagore and others alright.

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### Life & Legends

- ❖ Hafez was born in Shiraz, Iran. We don't find many historical account of his early life, and it has given rise to many legends regarding him.
- ❖ Legends say that he memorized the entire Quran and thereby was given the title "Hafez" meaning "the memorizer/ the safe keeper". He used that later as his pen name.
- ❖ Hafez was supported by patronage from several successive local regimes: Shah Abu Ishaq during his teenage; Timur at the end of his life; and even the strict ruler Shah Mubarez ud-Din Muhammad (Mubarez Muzaffar). His work flourished most under the 27-year rule of Jalal ud-Din Shah Shuja (Shah Shuja).
- ❖ Hafez also exchanged letters and poetry with Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah, the Sultan of Bengal (1390-1410), who also invited him to Sonargaon though he could not make it.

So, let us take a look at his life from a closer perspective why was he called Hafez. Before that Hafez was born in Shiraz of course, during those times we did not have the concept of history as we have it now. Of course, there existed historical consciousness, but that presented itself in a different way through stories legends poetry and all that so not in the exact sense of date and we know it now that is the western notion of history. So, in that sense, we do not know much of his details, but whatever we know is through stories written by his peers maybe his successors and all that. Legends say that he had kind of an enviable memory he was so good that he could recite the entire Quran. Legends say that he memorized the entire Quran in such a way that he could as well recite it anyway which way people wanted him to recite it, that is why considering his legendary power of recalling he was called Hafez. Hafez means a true memorizer or the safe keeper who has committed an entire culture to an entire word of god, the so-called word of god, or holy word in his memory. So, that is why he was called Hafez. Hafez of course, enjoyed the patronage of many kings and they knew his importance they continued their patronage, and they extended their support in all possible ways. But it is said that his work flourished especially under the 27-year rule of Jalal-ud-Din Shah Shuja, he is popularly called Shah Shuja. And, of course, while discussing Hafez's links with India he had extraordinary links with India. In the sense that he corresponded with Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah of India and he had even invited Hafez to come to India and stay here for some time, but unfortunately that did not materialize, but otherwise they were familiar with each other. So, that is an active India connection that Hafez enjoys.

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- ❖ Twenty years after his death, a tomb, the **Hafezieh**, was erected to honor Hafez in the Musalla Gardens in Shiraz. The current mausoleum was designed by André Godard, a French archeologist and architect, in the late 1930s, and the tomb is raised up on a dais amidst rose gardens, water channels, and orange trees. Inside, Hafez's alabaster sarcophagus bears the inscription of two of his poems.
- ❖ According to legends, Hafez also byhearted Rumi, Sadi and Nizami along with holy Quran. He is also known to have worked in a bakery before meeting his Sufi master, Hajji Zayn al-Attar.



20 years after his death, of course, a tomb was erected in his memory - Hafezieh and, of course, even to this day that acts as an epitome of great love, great compassion, and unequivocal devotion to god. Of course, Hafez itself, Hafez himself has come to symbolize an extraordinary or profound love his poetry talks about an uncanny love that exists between the creator and his or her creation. Therefore, even to this day, Hafezieh stands testimony to his love and what of course, the creator's love for his creation Hafeziah the tomb of Hafez.

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### **Hafeziah, the tomb of Hafez**



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## Legacy

Hafez was acclaimed throughout the Islamic world during his lifetime, with other Persian poets imitating his work, and offers of patronage from Baghdad to India.

His work was first translated into English in 1771 by William Jones. It would leave a mark on such Western writers as Thoreau, Goethe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The last referred to him as "a poet's poet".

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has his character Sherlock Holmes state that "there is as much sense in Hafez as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world" (The Case of Identity). Friedrich Engels mentioned Hafez in his 1853 letter to Karl Marx.

He was acclaimed as one of the greatest poets throughout the Islamic world during his lifetime. Of course, most of the time it so happens with writers that during their lifetime people do not appreciate their value they do not even know their value its only after their death. In fact, death gives the poet a new lease on life. It is only after the poet dies that he starts living again in a paradoxical way. So, I mean fortunately for Hafez even during his lifetime he was well recognized and rewarded. The first translation of his work was made available in English in the 18th century, of course, remember that was the time of William Jones. William Jones also played a major role in translating many of our Sanskrit works into English, but of course, after Edward Said's *Orientalism*, we know how this also becomes a colonialist agenda to further the goals of imperialism. Whatever they may be it was in 1771 that, William Jones first translated Hafez and made the entire western world familiar with the greatness of Hafez. And, he was so popular that even sir Arthur Conan Doyle, I am sure you will have read some of his stories the detective story Sherlock Holmes, even he says there is as much sense in Hafez as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world. So, if Horace the Greek poet Horace is an epitome of or one of the greatest poets, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle goes on to say that Hafez is equally good.

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### The Poetry of Hafez, the Sufi Maestro

Hafez wrote Persian lyric poems known as *ghazals*. The most prominent theme in his poems, keeping in tune with the *ghazal* tradition, is the tussle between love and reason. Hafez is also known for his mysticism. Offers a critique of the religious and ruling establishments. Some important English translation of his poetry.



**Faces of Love**, translated by Dick Davis.  
Published by Penguin Classics (2012).



**The Collected Lyrics of Hafiz of Shiraz** (2007), translated by Peter Avery. Awarded Iran's Farabi prize



**The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master**, translated by Daniel Ladinsky for Penguin Putman (1999)

And entire world knowledge put together constitutes the greatness of Hafez to that extent Hafez is important to us. Thanks to several translations today we have extraordinary access to probably almost we have access to everything of Hafez or most of what Hafez wrote. So, his Persian lyric poems which are written in the styles of ghazals are available to us thanks to translation. So, as we said some of the prominent concerns in his works include a kind of a tussle between love and reason. Because the concern of rationality is our welfare in the here, whereas, the concern of love is our welfare in the here as well as in the hereafter. Therefore, there is a kind of a tussle between love and reason and most of the times love wins over reason for rightful reasons. And of course, that is the reason why his poetry, of course, his poetry does it in a beautiful elegant and mystic ways. So, you can no longer wonder if you find him one of the extraordinary mystics, that you have read mysticism his poetry is steeped in Sufi culture ghazal tradition, and of course, it reeks off mysticism in the most positive way that we can think of. So, and more than that, they are spiritual truths, but they are not religious. If we do not know the distinction between being religious and being spiritual it would be really unfortunate. If we are religious, religion may make us create dogmas, but not so much spirituality. Religion has or operates within, certain socio, political, and geographical boundaries whereas, spirituality has no boundary therefore, spirituality. So, in the best spiritual tradition, his poetry exemplifies the relationship of human beings with the creator it knows no religion alright. That is the reason why most of the religions and establishments the ruling establishments they find at the firing side of Hafez's poetry. Hafez's poetry almost



offers a pungent critique of established religion and monarchy. So, these are some of the translations that we have of Hafez's 'Faces of Love', translated by Dick Davis and published by Penguin Classics. And of course, we have *The Collected Lyrics of Hafiz of Shiraz* translated by Peter Avery, and it is also it was also awarded with Iran's Farabi prize considering the quality and contribution of this particular book in spreading the word of Hafez, Iran government of course, honoured him honour the poet-translator with Farabi prize. And we also have Daniel Ladinsky's *The Gift: Poems by Hafez* the great Sufi master. So, if you are really interested in finding a lifelong companion for yourself or if you need to actualize if self-actualization is what you desire then probably you can begin with the poetry of Hafez.

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**Hafez Lines...**

- "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."
- "What we speak becomes the house we live in."
- "Be kind to your sleeping heart. Take it out into the vast fields of light...And let it breathe."

'Ever since  
happiness  
heard your name,  
it has been  
running through the  
streets trying  
to find you.'  
-Hafez

A man in a light blue shirt and glasses is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide, likely the presenter.

So, let us take a quick look at what Hafez says, some beautiful remarkable lines so that we have a first-hand taste of what he writes.

“What do sad people have in common? He asks and answers, 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.”

Well, why are we unhappy? We start recalling an unhappy incident that may have happened in the past and we start creeping about it and wailing about it making it some kind of a religious ceremony that is probably why many people are happy or most of us are happy. So, when do we I mean most of us are sad? When do we begin feeling the happiness of course,

when we stop being so, religiously attached to the past and so religiously getting attached to the future. Remember in one of our earlier classes we said that past, present and future when you tug yourself with past or when you tug yourself with future it is you do not know what path it leads to, but it also leads to unhappiness. Whereas, if we realize that the present is all we have and start living every moment of our life completely that is when we become immortal we also discuss this concept right. Immortality is not living forever but living every moment we have as if that is the final moment living fully completely in that moment that is when we can say. In fact, here we can recall a quick and a short Zen story right. Once there was a restaurant owner who was searching for a great Zen master of course, because of the preoccupation he had to serve his guests he could not go anywhere right. One day he found a strange guest sipping a cup of tea holding that cup of tea in both his hands and sipping every sip of tea as if that is the last moment or as if that is the only thing that is the last sip that is available something like that, that is when the restaurant owner realizes that he has come face to face with the greatest Zen master. A Zen a true Zen guru is one who knows the importance of the present and lives totally in that moment. So, probably Hafez highlights the ability to live in the present and that is the route to happiness.

“What we speak becomes the house we live in.”

Look at these lines look at these remarkable lines, what we speak become becomes the house we live in. When we utter something these are not dry sounds when we speak something either with our friends either in either our family members or anywhere they are not just dry sounds they have an aura to them they have a dimension and they are capable of constructing something. So, if I utter a positive word it creates an abode for me in which I can live, if I utter an unpleasant word it creates a house around me and you will have to you and I have to start living in that therefore, how about saying positive things how about saying pleasant things. So, that we get to live in the pleasant thing in the pleasant house is not it. And, then be kind to your sleeping heart take it out into the vast field of light and let it breathe, let it breathe. Looking at your own heart as if you're as if that is your companion and going out enjoying nature connecting with bonding with nature how is it and here is a remarkable short poem which I really like and enjoy a lot.

“Ever since  
happiness  
heard your name

it has been  
running through the  
streets trying  
to find you “

Look at how excited happiness is to find us once when we know that we grow less fearful of the past and less anxious about the future and start living the present in a complete way ok yeah.

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Here is another great poem that celebrates the concept of togetherness in a remarkable way. How the world cannot afford disunity how in unity lies the life and in division lies our death. Dividing among the people division of people leads to death and uniting them gives them life something like that.

“Out  
of a great need,  
we are all holding hands  
and  
climbing”

It is an eternal journey imagine our life as one big pilgrimage. Or one big journey if you are not a believer no problem if you are not a believer you do not need to be a believer, but you

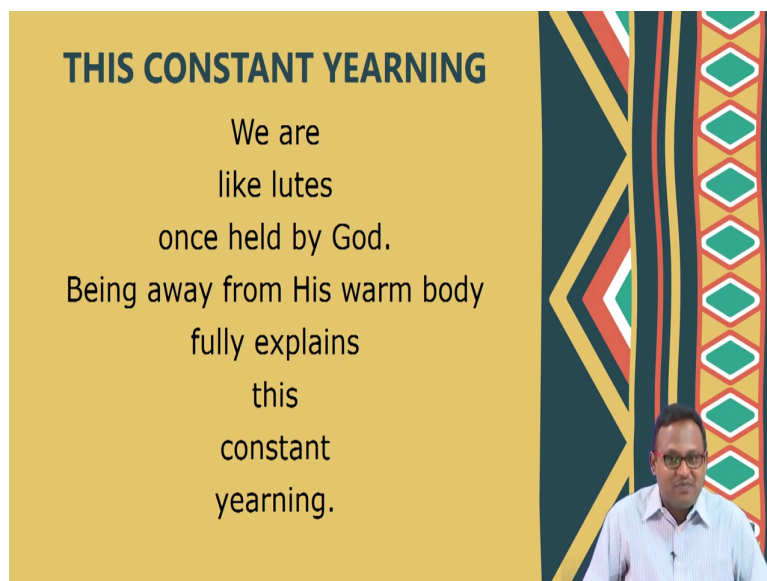


have to realize that life is a journey right life is a journey. So, then in this journey, all of us who have cohabited on this planet are climbing this because we are travelling together that is the reason why we need to hold each other's hand we need to hold each other's hands and climb together. That is the need no loving is a letting go. There is no option for us not to love if you do not love then it is a letting go you are pushing somebody down then the chain becomes weak and if the chain becomes weak we also fall down. Remember a chain is only as strong as its weakest link alright. So, what is the weakest link here if the entire humanity is in one big chain then if we let down one individual the strength of the chain comes down, therefore, we need to go together for that?

“Listen  
the terrain around here  
is far too  
dangerous  
for that.”

So, let us not do that let's hold each other's hands and walk together with a great need, a remarkable poem that highlights companionship with the entire world not just with people around you, but with the entire people that exist across space.

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**THIS CONSTANT YEARNING**

We are  
like lutes  
once held by God.  
Being away from His warm body  
fully explains  
this  
constant  
yearning.

And another beautiful poem that highlights the connection or, an umbilical connection that exists between our creator and us.

“We are like lutes once held by God, we are like lutes once held by god”. Being away from his warm body fully explains this constant yearning. Sometimes we feel there is some kind of a vacuum most of the time we may feel this vacuum as some kind of an emptiness that is because we have been away from god. So, probably that vacuum can be filled when we reconnect ourselves with god, it is through God that we seek our life or because we are away from god or godly that is why probably we feel a little less connected. So, if we can, of course, that can also happen when once when we start connecting with people around. He is not being religious here in fact, what he is saying is yeah the next poem should make it clear when Hafez talks of a relationship with God it is not in a religious sense it is in a spiritual sense because he is capable of finding god in all the faces. So, as long as we can connect with even fellow human beings around us we are in touch with god.

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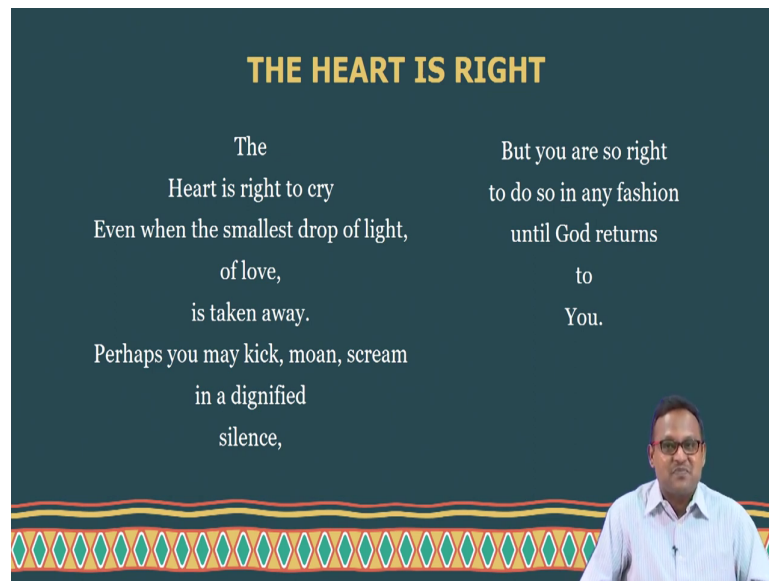


It becomes clear to us when we read subsequent poems.

Greatness  
is always built upon this foundation  
the ability  
to appear speak and act  
as the most  
common  
man.

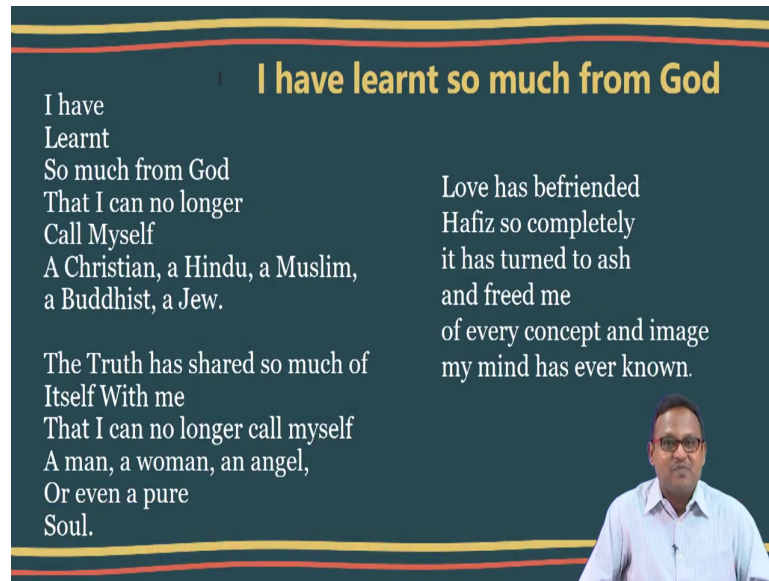
Of course, all these poems have a Zen-like quality, of course, they are not haikus, but they are inspired by the spirit of haikus because using minimum words they impart maximum meaning. So, the key to greatness is not to show off, the key to greatness is to appear speak or act and then disappear, to live in being common is an extraordinary way of becoming uncommon or becoming extraordinary which is a key to becoming extraordinary.

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Yeah and look at this the heart is right to cry even when the smallest drop of light of love is taken away. Why do we cry? Most of the time we feel we cry right why do we feel because we feel a drop of light or a drop of love is taken away from us that is why probably we cry. And nothing wrong with that let us not be ashamed of crying because crying both psychologically and spiritually is a way of filling the void within us it is a way of filling the void within us. That is why perhaps you may kick moan scream in a dignified silence you may do whatever you want still we cry and you are so right to do so in any fashion until God returns to you. So, in other words, you can even call crying kind of an invitation to god an invitation to god. So, if you think you are crying a lot these days or you feel like crying do not worry you are just calling out god and god will appear to you or your companion will appear to you in some way or the other. You will find the spirit that is going to uplift your life in some remarkable way so if you are crying; that means, you are just calling out that is all ok, it is a prayer to meet something great.

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Yeah here is that is the reason I said he is not religious, but spiritual. Now, look at it he says:

I have  
learnt  
so much from God  
that I can no longer  
call myself  
A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim,  
a Buddhist or a Jew.

These are just divisions, religion sometimes creates this division, not the best element of religion, but religion has certain not so best elements. Therefore those kinds of worst elements create division, so he says I do not consider myself any of these things.

The truth has shared so much of  
itself with me  
that I can no longer call myself  
A man, a woman, an angel,  
or even a pure  
Soul.

Love has befriended  
Hafiz so completely  
it has turned to ash  
and freed me  
of every concept and image  
my mind has ever known.

If you are truly possessed by love, if we are truly possessed by love, then we cease to believe in this division because when we look at a fellow human being all that we can see in him or her is some compassion some element of love.



I am sure you enjoyed these poems before we call it a day probably you can just take a look at another poem or maybe another poem and then you can read some of his translations available. I am sure you will find a companion for life in Hafez and his great works.

Thank you.