

VISIO



DIVINA

The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision

LISTEN TO THE MUSIC

Hafez

This short poem by Hafez has now become a chant used in contemplative communities. Hafez, a devout Muslim, obviously understood something important about Christ and Christianity. He knew that the breath of the divine which breathed through Yeshua was also a breath that could breathe through any human being. His primary image, though, is one of a reed flute, called a *ney* in the Persian language.

The image of a reed-flute to describe a human's role in the music played by God is used by many poets, and is famous in the opening lines of Rumi's masterpiece, the **Mathnawi**. The hollow reed-flute has a natural history as well as a literary history: its inception is in a bed of reeds and the shoreline from which it is cut, taken and hollowed out for some higher purpose. All of these steps are metaphoric and clearly Hafez's mind as he crafts his short poem.

God, as Christ's breath, makes music through human beings. Humans beings can become instruments in creating this kind of music for the world. We do not fully realize this, but the Persian poets use the imagery to teach us about human availability to the divine breath. When God picks up a human being as an instrument for music it may not be something we are happy about. It disturbs us, but something of great beauty is produced.

The traditional native flute is similar to the Middle Eastern instrument. Not only is the musical tonality alike, when played by someone who has acquired great skill through much practice, the result is completely captivating to the human hear.

The phrase the "Christ-breath" implies that this is not just anyone picking up a flute and blowing through it; rather a skilled and visionary performer with an ear for a particularly beautiful kind of music. It is music from the lips of a master of the reed, from the lips of a musician possessing the Christ-Spirit.

One can simply hear music, or one can truly listen to it. There is a difference. Hearing background music is not the same thing as listening to music in silence and with focused attention. In this poem we are invited to listen to the music that is being played through us as instruments of the divine breath.

The poet says we are holes and empty spaces through which the divine Breath can move. We perhaps prefer to be filled space, but we must empty ourselves so that, as Rumi says, the Spirit can fill and flow through us.

This is increasingly possible as the soul ripens and opens itself to the divine Sun and the winds of Spirit.

The poet called simply Hafez (1315-1390) was born and lived most of his life in the southern city of Shiraz, Iran. It is a city renowned for its many gardens, and his tomb and shrine there is itself a beautiful rose-garden that attracts many visitors from Iran and around the world. He knew and loved the works of Rumi, and memorized the Qur'an by heart, hence the name "Hafez" (the one who memorizes).

Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *What is the process of making a reed ready to become a flute which can be played? Is this an image that we can use to understand the skill required in creating the proper instrument? How might you describe that process in yourself? If indeed you are a divine instrument for music-making, how has that process happened in you?*
2. *What music have you heard coming through the reed-flute of your own life? Describe it if you can. Can you hear it? Do others hear it? How do you know?*
3. *Should we listen to our own music? What does it sound like to your heart, or to your inner ear?*
4. *If you have an opportunity, listen to flute music coming either from Native North American tradition or from one of the traditions of the Middle East. How does it sound to your ear? How is it different from a violin, a trumpet, or a piano?*
5. *Examine your life to see if it too has been picked up by God to carry the Christ-breath and its song. Is this metaphor useful for you? How does it strike you?*
6. *Look at the illuminations. There are many ways of imagining Hafez's poetic metaphors. Which of these images speaks most to you? What draws you to it? What does it teach you?*

and your Journaling:

This reflection, text and its illumination have been provided by Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman as a means for contemplative vision and prayer.

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A Place for Notes

LECTIO DIVINA

The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text

I am a hole in a flute
that
the Christ-breath moves through.
Listen to its music.
Listen to its music.

—Khwaja Shams-ud-Din Muhammad Hafez-e Shirazi

—Arranged and edited
for public reading and illumination by
Lynn C. Bauman

Contemplating
THE ILLUMINATIONS



