

# praying at the speed of Love



Episode 21: Peter Booth—

Hafiz, the Poet of Love

Thursday, January 16, 2020

[music]

*You are not moving, you are being moved.  
You are not singing, you are being sung.  
You are not praying, you are being prayed  
Prayed at the speed of love.*

Janet Conner You are not moving; you are being moved. You are not singing; you are being sung. You are not praying; you are being prayed, prayed at the speed of love. I'm Janet Conner, *Prayer Artist*, and you have arrived. You have arrived at the speed of love to a party. It's a celebration. This is episode 21, the 21<sup>st</sup> conversation in my new podcast, *Praying at the Speed of Love*, and it is January. That means that today *Praying at the Speed of Love* is one year old.

And this is happening because of you. You, the thousands of listeners who download this very unusual podcast. I'm still practicing saying that this is post-patriarchal prayer podcast. You see, I'm still struggling with how to say that. It's all about prayer, but if you've been listening, you know this is not your father's prayer.

On *Praying at the Speed of Love*, we are talking about original prayer, but original is a very evocative word. It means forever ancient. I'm deeply interested in how did we pray 1000, 2000, 5000, 8000, 50,000 years ago. Humans have always prayed. How did we pray? But at the exact same time, even though this doesn't make any intellectual sense, I'm absolutely certain that prayer is forever new. It's brand new in the moment that the prayer is moving through you. It is forever ancient; it is always new.

In other words, it's mystical, mystical prayer where we drop into what I love to call the mystic, where everything is one, everything is connected, has always been connected in original source, one source, one love, original love. In other words, prayer before, way before, and prayer way after this tiny, tiny box that our patriarchal religions have stuffed it in.

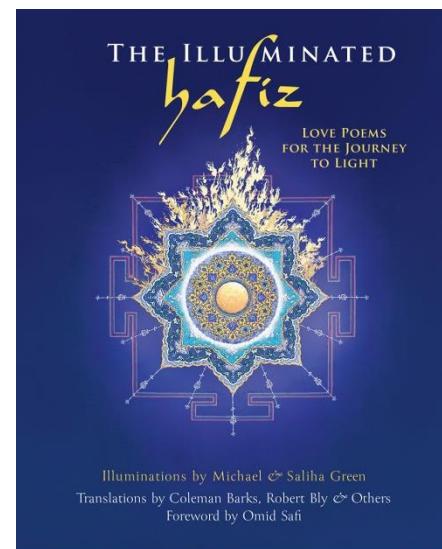
Together, we are exploring the true nature of sacred, delicious, enchanting prayer, prayer that vibrates—it's alive—prayer that vibrates through your whole body. And it is singing a song of love. That's why the theme song says you're not singing; you are being sung. You are not praying; you are being prayed. This

thread of always ancient, always new mystical prayer is singing its love song in and through and as you.

So do you know who's been singing these love songs for over 700 years? Hafiz, Hafiz, Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz from Shiraz, Iran. You know him, I know him, as just simply Hafiz. Who is this mystical poet? Why have people been listening to him for 700 years?

Well, today we are so blessed to sit with a Hafiz scholar and translator, Peter Booth, a lead contributor to a book—you might as well write it down. You might as well place your order. It belongs on your permanent library shelf—*The Illuminated Hafiz*. But listen to the subtitle: *Love Poems for the Journey to Light*.

In this conversation, with Peter, yes, but really with Hafiz because he's in the room, there is something waiting for you. There is a nugget of love. It's hovering in the air right now, waiting to enter your heart and transform your world. So let us begin this conversation as we always do, listening to the voice of the Tibetan bowl as she calls us to open our invisible ears, the ears of our heart, that we may what wants to be heard.



[the bowl rings]

Think she's pretty happy about this conversation. She's singing a very beautiful love song, and it doesn't want to end. But I want to introduce you to Peter Booth. He has an unusual childhood. While you and I were playing around doing typical pre-teen and teen stuff, he was studying Sanskrit [laughter]. He studied Sanskrit and the sacred Indian texts at Georgetown University, got a B.A. in English Literature from Bard, then attended Harvard Graduate School in Persian Language and Literature.

He also studied Persian Literature at its home, the Ferdowsi University of Mashad, and then he lived in Meher Baba's home, Meherabad, in rural India for, are you ready, 32 years. I think this is why we get to say scholar and expert, whether Peter likes it or not. He is the coauthor of a very important book, *Dante / Hafiz* because they were contemporaries. They were speaking the same language. They were whispering love songs in one another's ears.

He is a contributor to this gorgeous book, *The Illuminated Hafiz*, and is working on a detailed study of the poetry of Hafiz, *The Incomparable*—isn't that just the greatest word—*The Incomparable Hafiz*. We are blessed that Peter joins us from his home in North Myrtle Beach in South Carolina. Welcome, Peter.

Peter Booth Well, thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for having me.

Janet Conner Oh. And Hafiz, Hafiz has been talking to me for a long time.

Peter Booth Oh, wonderful! [crosstalk].

Janet Conner So I am excited to have this conversation.

Peter Booth Oh, wonderful. Fantastic. Well good.

Janet Conner But the podcast is about prayer. It's actually not about the book. It's about prayer, but, of course in this case, that is about the book because Hafiz's poems are mystical prayers. But we always begin with your prayer life. And in 21 of these conversations, I'm noticing that there's always this weird, interesting... you're oblivious to it as a child, but there is a seed of the essence of prayer that's planted that then grows and blossoms until this conversation. So what's your prayer story?

Peter Booth Well, I'm from a family of American mystics, and it produced in my parents, especially my father, a type of personal relationship with God, if you want to say that. Now, there is the great American mystic, Thomas Mayhew, who in the 1600s... Thomas Mayhew was the man who first introduced the American Indians to Christ and got the first American Indians into college, which in those days was very hard because you had to know Greek and Latin.

But he said, interestingly enough, "The purpose of religion is to introduce man to God. Once man has been introduced to God, the purpose of religion is finished." And today, the great Persian Hafiz scholar and scholar of Persian literature, Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush, says that, "Mysticism is the personal relationship between any of us and God, without any intermediaries whatsoever." That is the definition of mysticism. Hafiz says essentially the same thing. He says, "Between the lover and the Beloved, there is no veil. Hafiz, you yourself are the veil. Get out of the way."

So mysticism is this communion between us and our creator. Now, what Hafiz has set out... you see, everybody's conception of God is different, although in general, we ascribe idealized human qualities to Him. He's our creator. He's compassionate. He is the one who answers our prayers. He's the one who we can turn to for solace in times of difficulty. And all of our conceptions are formed according to the way that he answers our prayers or doesn't answer them.

For example, if you pray for the health of someone who is sick and that person is cured or their illness is ameliorated because of your prayers, then you know, "He is the one who I can pray to when I need to help someone who is in trouble who is sick." And that becomes one of his attributes according to your personal experience.

So the way Hafiz has it set up is he starts with love. Love is uncreated. It has no beginning. It has no end, and it's completely unimpressioned. And then, the qualities that we ascribe to that unimpressioned existence become God, and God is personal for each one of us, again, according to our experiences with that God. That's how we form our concept.

And then, love, God, with coquettish human attributes becomes the Beloved, and the Beloved in Hafiz has both male and female attributes because the third person singular in Persian can be feminine or masculine. And Hafiz says, "Normally, where there is the ruby lip, there is not the musky down. Praise be to my Beloved who has both."

Janet Conner But did your family introduce you to this depth of ecstatic communion and love with the divine when you were five, six, seven, eight? You said your family's mystics so—

Peter Booth Oh yeah. Well, see—

Janet Conner —how did they teach you to pray? This was before you knew anything about Hafiz.

Peter Booth Right. Exactly. Well, what they did... you see, this is the distillation of generations of mystics in my family. So my parents raised me with these precepts: never be mean to anybody; never think you're better than anybody else; and always, always, always think of others before you think of yourself. They were not religious, although they both had very long and prominent religious histories.

There was never a conversation about religion in my house. There was never a conversation about politics. There was never a conversation about money. My parents, their daily lives... they were in their own personal communion, which

they knew could not be quantified or qualified by any of these systems. It was completely personal, and that was my start in life.

And they also told me not to do well in school. Yes. Because they knew that I wasn't stupid, and that I was fine. And they didn't want to see me become indoctrinated by a system. Now, the problem is, with an education system, you begin to measure yourself by what you're told and all these criteria and measurements, so your self-conception becomes dependent upon an external system. And they did not want to see that happen to me. They wanted to protect me from that so my personality would develop according to me, not according to what I was told I was and I wasn't.

Janet Conner So you have just described a very different childhood from, certainly, mine and probably most of the listeners. Did you understand as a kid how special and unique and different from the norm your family was?

Peter Booth Absolutely not because it was my family.

Janet Conner Your family.

Peter Booth And only years later did I realize what a gift it was to have that start in life. I mean, people talk about intuition, for example, and I am intuitive. And part of the reason why I think that developed is when you start to think about others, how others feel, the need of others, you begin to develop an intuition. You become more sensitive and more sensitive, and you begin to think, "Oh my god. This poor person is suffering, or they have a serious problem. And thank god I don't have that problem, but imagine how they must be suffering."

And see, then that awakens all sorts of good hormones in your system. And you become grateful, and you become thankful. And it's really just a wonderful way to go through life, and it's non-religious. It's non-religious. It's spontaneous. It's individual.

Janet Conner Oh, I'm so jealous. It's taken me this long, to 71, to finally separate all of that from the religious indoctrination. You're very blessed.

Peter Booth Very blessed.

Janet Conner Maybe that's why Hafiz is sitting on your left shoulder there. So would you introduce us to him? Who is Hafiz?

Peter Booth Well, he lived from about 1350 to 1390 in the beautiful city of Shiraz, Iran, and he came from a poor family. His family was probably in the coal business, and he would make deliveries around Shiraz for the family business.

And one day, on a balcony, he saw an incredibly gorgeous, elegant woman, Shakh-e Nabat, "the branch of sugarcane," and Hafiz fell deeply in love with her and became completely obsessed with obtaining her. But Hafiz was squat and ugly and from a poor family, and she was elegant and aristocratic and very refined.

So there was something called the *Chilla-nashini*, which is actually a Semitic ritual where you sit inside a circle for 40 days and 40 nights without sleeping or eating, and if you can go through that, then God will give you whatever boon you want. So Hafiz decides to do that. He was so helplessly in love with this woman, and he completes the ritual.

And the angel Gabriel comes to Hafiz and says, "What would you like?" And the effulgence coming out of the angel Gabriel was so much more beautiful than Shakh-e Nabat, Hafiz thought, "Look at this. This is just God's messenger," and he said, "I want God." And so then the angel Gabriel sent Hafiz to a God-realized spiritual figure who then undertook his spiritual unfoldment, and he began writing poetry that tried to capture the penetrating beauty of Gabriel's speech. So that's his story.

So that for us... I mean, who's going to believe something like that? But in Iran, these mystical events are accepted. It's very much a part of the culture.

Janet Conner    So the person that pops into my mind and probably to all the listeners in this conversation about Hafiz is Rumi. They're like the twin boys in incredible mystical poetry that has continued and continued into today's world, and lots of people are familiar with Rumi. So could you give us kind of a compare and contrast?

Peter Booth    Sure. Yeah. Rumi, again, came across a great spiritual teacher, Shams-i-Tabrizi, and fell totally in love with him in a spiritual sense, not at all a sexual sense. Some people are trying to promote that idea that it was a homoerotic relationship. Really, no, it wasn't that. It was purely spiritual.

And in the east, the idea of these God-realized souls who become guides of others is common, both in the Islamic tradition and also in the Hindu tradition. And St. Francis, for example, in Christianity was one of them, yeah, and maybe Father Lawrence.

Anyway, so what happened was Rumi became so enthralled by the beauty of Shams that he began writing this gorgeous poetry which is overwhelming. It's this ocean pouring forth, couplet after couplet, sonnet, *ghazal* after *ghazal*.

Hafiz's art is very different. Rumi overwhelms the mind. Hafiz uses the mind to write around the mind to touch the heart. And the way he does that is he took the *ghazal*, which is 7 to, say, 12 couplets in length usually, and he took all logical progression out of it.

Each couplet is like an arrow that comes out of nowhere and pierces your heart, and to form the arrow, he would take regular concrete vocabulary like wine, goblet, tavern, and infuse them with this incredible, vast, mystical meaning. So these great concepts all of a sudden come out of nowhere, and they pierce right into your heart. And that is transforming. That is prayer in action. That is the prayer that spiritually transforms us. It's revelation. It's poetic revelation.

Can I quote something for you?

Janet Conner Oh yeah. Let's have an example.

Peter Booth Okay. Well, here are two couplets. I'll repeat each one twice. The first one is, *Words in the Beloved's mouth...* means God's mouth. *Words in the Beloved's mouth are as pearls, but Hafiz's speech is better.*

How is that possible?

Okay. Now, here's the second one.

*I as the white lily and you Beloved as the red rose we were in pure companionship and whatever was in your heart was spoken by my tongue.*

See? There he explains how it works. In Persian poetry, the lily signifies the tongue of the lover because of its shape. It is shaped like a tongue. The rose, which symbolizes the Beloved, has petals that don't allow it to speak, so it's the Beloved who inspires the lover to song, who is sung to. The Beloved is not the singer. The lover is the nightingale. The lover is the poet, so his speech becomes greater than the Beloved's speech. That's how it works.

Janet Conner Just your average, run-of-the-mill concept [laughter]. I'm sitting here trying to wrap my head around that. That's in English, which is already... brain is trying hard here to grasp this mystical concept. But of course, he wrote in Persian, and you translated it directly from the Persian. So could you give us a little window into how Persian is very unique?

In the introduction to *The Illuminated Hafiz*, you write that Persian doesn't have any capital letters and the gender... it's not like Spanish where the gender is tied. So what does this look like in Persian, and how in the world do you then get it into English?

Peter Booth What I do, you see... well, can I read a couplet about the mind first?

*I have measured it and the impression of reason on love's path is like a drop of dew drawing a figure on the ocean.*

Can I do another one?

*I gave reason wine as a provision for the road and sent him out of the city of existence.*

Janet Conner [laughter] I love this. I can see it. Here you go. Here's your go cup, you know?

Peter Booth Yeah [laughter]. Right, right.

Janet Conner Get on the highway. Buh-bye. Stick your thumb out. Just, reason, you need to go over there.

Peter Booth But see, there's redemption in that because the wine is the wine of love, so reason too is going to be transformed into love, is going to come out of itself. And see, Hafiz is very against religion because religion is a manifestation of reason, of the rational mind, so he rails against... he says the *mullahs*, the priests, have hijacked the spiritual process by convincing people that they are not worthy enough to pursue God on their own, and they need their sanctioning. And the priests say, "We know what this is about. You feel insufficient. You feel incapable. Just do what we tell you, and everything will be fine."

And then, of course, it becomes ritualized according to what the religious dictates are. And by doing that then, they not just take over the spiritual process, which is personal—real mysticism, again, is different for each person—but they prevent it from happening because you were always doing what you were told by somebody who's trying to keep you involved with the system that somehow takes advantage of you.

Again, Thomas Mayhew, "The purpose of religion is to introduce one to God. Once one has been introduced to God, the purpose of religion is over."

Janet Conner And Hafiz says that over and over.

Peter Booth Over and over again. Yes, yes. So it's the same. It's the same in mystical Christianity. It's the same in mystical Islam. It's the same in Vedanta. Yeah.

Janet Conner And all of those patriarchal religions are trying desperately to get people to not notice that [laughter].

Peter Booth Of course. Oh, no. It puts them out of work.

Janet Conner Exactly.

Peter Booth Yeah. It puts all of them out of work. Yeah.

Janet Conner So what Hafiz is doing in these words... and thank you so much for repeating. It take the third, fourth, fifth time. I notice that when I'm reading *The Illuminated*

*Hafiz*, I have to say it out loud. Those words just can't sit there on the page. I have to say them out loud. And the brain is slowly letting go of what I think it's saying, and then it has an effect. It changes without my necessarily intellectually understanding.

So how does he do that? Is it the symbols? Because he has these repeating... friend, tavern, rose, nightingale, right? These symbols repeat and repeat and repeat. How does he do this, or is that just we can't understand that?

Peter Booth It's a very, very good question. Have you ever tried to still your mind in meditation?

Janet Conner Tried [laughter].

Peter Booth And what happens? A thought will come in in a verbal form, right?

Janet Conner Oh yeah.

Peter Booth So the very substrate, the structure of our consciousness, is verbal according to what language we speak. Hafiz knew this. So if you want to elevate consciousness, if you want to build a bridge from consciousness to higher consciousness, you change the underpinnings of language, so the very foundation of consciousness is changed.

And you do that by mystically infusing all of the vocabulary of the language that forms consciousness with concepts of universal, unlimited, eternal love. And that is the poetry of revelation, which he is the master of.

Janet Conner So a person could have their own... once you begin to pay attention to this substrate of language, we could start with Hafiz's friend, tavern, wine, this language, but then... because I'm thinking about my own experience here.

There's a unique vocabulary that rises in and through me, like this word the mystic. I don't think I've ever read that anywhere, but I see it. I hear it. I feel it that there's this drop. That's the way I feel it and see it is that I simply drop out of my conscious mind, and I'm in what I call the mystic. What is that? I couldn't tell you [laughter]. You have to drop into the mystic and find out for yourself.

But that's a tiny example of languaging that rises in me and then changes, and then it becomes my verbal language. So is that what's going on? We're all kind of creating our own mystical substrate language?

Peter Booth Hopefully, and that's why prayer is so important or the value of focusing. And say, you can make it as simple as, "What is the meaning of life?" And you begin to then question... I mean, "Look at these fabulous human forms. Look at this incredible consciousness. Where did all this come from?"

I mean, we know we evolved out of nature. And you begin to then dwell in a realm of greater and deeper significance, where things have much more meaning than was previous to beginning to try to question what all of this is about.

And I get to the place where everything that happens in my life is because my creator, call it love, call it God, wants to free me, so I can become reunited. And everything that comes along is done out of love to bring me closer and closer and closer, all the people I meet, everything that happens.

And in that sense, for me, I always remind myself—and, of course, we all meet very distasteful people and people we're not particularly fond of—I remind myself, "Always try to do the best for everyone who comes into your life." That is how we uphold love, and that becomes a prayer because you become tolerant. You become, again, understanding.

Janet Conner Well, you're so speaking my language. I was awakened a few months ago and given a very clear directive that the purpose of my life and the purpose of, I think, everyone's life right now is to make love visible. Patriarchy has done a spectacular job of making suffering visible. Look around. You can see it.

Peter Booth I know.

Janet Conner If we're going to transform the world, now we have to make love visible. Now, how? I guess every single person finds their way, but Hafiz is the language of love. They're love poems. And so he is holding out, "Here is a way to see love, to be love, and to make love visible in your life for others."

Peter Booth Absolutely. You know—

Janet Conner Or [crosstalk].

Peter Booth Absolutely. Excuse me. He says... just jogs my memory. He says,

*The only sin in our religion is to ever hurt another.*

There's no morality in Hafiz. There's no exclusion of anyone because love is unconditional. The minute you begin to tack these conditions on love, love is no longer love. It has become conditioned. So that's why he says,

*The only sin in our religion is to ever hurt another.*

And that's all you need. That's it.

Janet Conner But based on that startling, magnificent definition that means that there's a lot of sin going on. Woah. Because a lot of people are hurting other people.

Peter Booth Oh my god. Oh, it's just crazy. And none of us are perfect. We all are guilty of slighting people. Under tremendous pressure, even good people will take advantage of others. But it's a constant reminder. We're all suffering. We all need help. We have to be kinder.

And that's one of the things... I've lived in India for so long, and of course, I lived in Iran. The basic human qualities are universal, you see, of understanding, of kindness, of compassion. And of course, they're good and bad everywhere, but the majority of the basic human qualities cut across all societies, the ones I've experienced anyway, religious backgrounds, if you want to go to that.

And even if you watch a Persian film, if you watch a Hindi film, if you watch an American film, the themes will be the same, just the same, of the hero who overcomes bad, of unrequited love which is finally fulfilled, the person who out of compassion rescues somebody who's in a horrible predicament. It's just the same.

The patriarchal, these divisions are very unfortunate. Now, Hafiz is far more a Christian and a Zoroastrian poet than he is a Muslim poet. He mentions Muhammad twice in his poetry. He mentions Jesus countless times.

Janet Conner That is so, so interesting. Of course, it goes right back to what you taught us, what you said, which is Christian mystic, Muslim mystic, Buddhist mystic, it doesn't matter.

Peter Booth It doesn't.

Janet Conner We're going to reach this same place. But give us some insights into that, his Christianity and Zoroastrian. My knowledge of Zoro, it's this big. So yeah. Give us some insights—

Peter Booth Well, Zoroaster is the prophet of Iran. He probably lived about 5000 BC. How do they say that these days? They changed it. When I grew up it was—

Janet Conner Yeah. You have to say Common Era or BCE, before the Common Era.

Peter Booth BCE. Okay, fine. Thank you. And [laughter] his only message was good thoughts, good words, good deeds. That was it, but he was monotheistic. He probably, in this cycle of time, gave the world monotheism. And there was, according to the Persian historians, a pan of Iranian-Indian monotheism based on Zoroaster, and it might be that the Semitic religions got their monotheism from Zoroaster, the idea of the prophet. And the magi were Zoroastrian, the magi who bring the... those are the Zoroastrians.

Janet Conner So it's easy to find his references to Christ, Christ consciousness, but how do you know? Are there like word clues or images to—?

Peter Booth Well, yeah. I'll give you one. He says,

*On the night of your death go to the heavens like Christ and the light of your soul will light up thousands of realms.*

So he praises Christ—

Janet Conner [crosstalk].

Peter Booth [crosstalk].

Janet Conner And the Zoroastrian presence, what does that sound like?

Peter Booth Oh he refers to the spiritual guide as Pir-i-Moghan, the Zoroastrian elder. And the taverns, the Zoroastrian elder stays in the tavern. He's the tavern keeper, and he's the one who's dispensing the wine of love.

Janet Conner Oh, I missed that. That the tavern is a Zoroastrian master. I missed that.

Peter Booth Yeah. He's the tavern keeper.

Janet Conner So this particular book is *The Illuminated Hafiz*. There are glorious images, modern images, images that look like they're from the Indian continent. They're so evocative. So I'm curious. Did you and Coleman and whomever write the translations and then simply put the words in the hands of Michael Green, and they developed? Or was it a partnership? Which fed which?

Peter Booth No. What happened was Nancy Barton, the editor, came to me because she had read *Dante / Hafiz*, the first book I coauthored, and said, "Would you contribute to this?" and I said no because Coleman Barks and Robert Bly... and I've admired both of them. And Robert Bly is a great poet.

It's very interesting, now that I've hit on that. I'll get back to your point, but Goethe, Pushkin... you'll see in my essay I say Hafiz is hands down the most influential writer to ever take up a pen. And so many great writers have got to the point where they ask themselves, "What is the way forward?" They get into mystical realms. They get into poetry as a prayer of the heart, and then they search for the way forward.

And so many come to Hafiz and say, "He knows the way forward." Emerson did that. Goethe did that. Pushkin did that. The Urdu poets did that. The Indian poets did that. And now, Robert Bly and Coleman Barks have done that. So again, this is very alive as you said, and it's been going on for more than 600 years. The influence of this poet, it's that great.

So what we did... because Coleman Barks and Robert Bly don't know Persian, and I want to be a scholastic snob. I mean, if you're going to be a snob, you might as well be a scholastic one. "No, I don't want to get involved with anything. What do these guys know?" So she pestered me and pestered me and pestered me.

And so I was in Wabash, Indiana a couple years ago, and I love the small town Midwest. It is so wholesome, and it has such a wonderful, supportive, community feel about it. And I thought, "Gee, I wonder if there's anybody here who's into deeper mysticism?" So Nancy Barton was pestering me, and I said, "By the way,

where are you from?" And she said, "Wabash, Indiana [laughter]," and I said, "Okay. You can use whatever you want."

But what happened then... so I sent her 100 couplets, and she included some in there. But see, my translations are very exact from the Persian, and I said, "Put the Persian script in because the Persian community in the west will love it when they see good translations of their favorite poet." So then, Michael and Sally incorporated beautiful *Nastaliq* script—you can see it on some of those pages—into their illuminations, their drawings.

Janet Conner Yeah. Even if we can't read that or understand it, there is something about, not just the beautiful images of the birds and the flowers, but the calligraphy. And so even though I have not a clue what it's saying, it's so beautiful. It's so... it moves. It's alive. And so it lands on your heart without you having any idea what it is. It carries love.

Peter Booth It carries love. It carries mysticism. That's what it's designed to do. And by the way, I met Sally and Michael Green for the first time at a book reading we did together in Washington D.C. last week, and they are the kindest, most humble people. I was amazed. I call them the darling Green family, and they were with their son named Kabir.

Janet Conner Oh, how glorious.

Peter Booth And we're all searching. We're all trying to find genuine... what is genuine meaning? What is mysticism? And that's been their life journey, and it shows. They have such beautiful personalities and hearts. And see, that's what happens is this: gradually your heart purifies until one day you look in it, and you see your real self, all of creation, and your creator reflected. And then you become one with it.

Janet Conner So we're not there yet, but is there a poem or two that really do that for you, that really shatter you into oneness? You want to read a favorite or two?

Peter Booth Well, let's see what I have. Well, let me read this to you first about prayer. Hafiz says,

*What can I say for your nature is so delicate and tender one cannot pray quietly enough to suit it.*

See the simplicity? Here's one. This is a killer.

*There is no pen that has the tongue to unfold the secret of love; beyond the limit of articulation is the description of longing.*

See how elevated he takes that? For me, it blows my mind. Now, Hafiz is a great nature poet, as of course were the Romantics. I mean, generally, when we think about spirituality, we think about asceticism or removing oneself from the world,

becoming a hermit of sorts. Hafiz says no. It is nature and the world which produced this being, this consciousness, and it is what will produce God-realization. So he says,

*Be a lover if not one day your work in the world will come to an end without your having read the description of the aim of life from the workshop of existence.*

Now, he says all of this is like a show, and we are like sand that produces the pearl. And one day, when the pearl is perfect, the shell is removed, and we gain a new eternal, individual existence, which is imperishable. That is the purpose of everything, and that is who he says we become.

Janet Conner So after all these years with Hafiz, he sounds to me like he's very alive in you. Is your mystical life right now reading him? How would you describe the evolution from you as a seven-year-old kid with your parents being told to be kind to one another through this history with Hafiz, living in India, living in Iran, to today?

Peter Booth Well, I think that, especially in the modern world where there's so many forces of self-interest and exploitation afoot, it's very important for sensitive people—well, it's very important for everybody—to develop your own realm where you feel safe and protected, and you come to identify yourself and to exist in that more and more without necessarily withdrawing from the world, while being in the world.

But, for example, to use politics, say—and again, I was raised in a completely non-political family—so many people become invested in different political parties, political characters, and then they're disappointed in different ways.

Invest in yourself. All of those things are qualified, and anything having to do with politics is going to have worldly elements attached to it, which of course involve self-interest. Become absorbed in... you don't want to become narcissistic, but develop your own realm of meaning. Develop your own sense of the uniqueness of your personality.

There's never going to be another Janet. There never has been. You are completely unique, and you're never going to occur again. So come to peace. Don't be distracted. Don't be drawn out in terms of your beliefs and your aspirations. And make your aspiration to find meaning within yourself and to find beauty within yourself and to find a direct, inspired relationship with your creator, however you take that to be, within yourself.

Janet Conner So on *Praying at the Speed of Love*, we always pray together, meditate together, have some kind of experience together. This is rather deep to develop our own realm [laughter] of safety and love and meaning, but what do you say we do something. What do you want to do together to just touch that?

Peter Booth Oh, gee. Can I read a short prayer given by Meher Baba? This is called "The Prayer of Repentance," and this is to give people solace because we all do selfish things. No one goes through life without acts of meanness at some point, so,

*"We repent, oh God, most merciful, for all our sins, for every thought that was false or unjust or unclean, for every word spoken that ought not to have been spoken, for every deed done that ought not to have been done.*

*We repent for every deed and word and thought inspired by selfishness, and for every deed and word and thought inspired by hatred.*

*We repent most specially for every lustful thought and every lustful action, for every lie, for all hypocrisy, for every promise given but not fulfilled and for all slander and back biting.*

*Most specially, also, we repent for every action that has brought ruin to others, for every word and deed that has given others pain and for every wish that pain should befall others.*

*In your unbounded mercy, we ask you to forgive us, oh God, for all these sins committed by us, and to forgive us for our constant failures to think and speak and act according to your will. Amen."*

Janet Conner That's rather complete. That's in the book, isn't it?

Peter Booth No, it's not. This is from Meher Baba. This is what he gave to his followers to console them. Because if we hurt somebody, we feel bad. Yeah.

Janet Conner There are gifts. We have gifts, right? Every guest brings us gifts in those Prayer Bags. One of them in Prayer Bag #21, I assume, will be an excerpt from *The Illuminated Hafiz*, right?

Peter Booth Oh, yes. Absolutely. I wanted to say, by the way, that the other contributors have done a very good job, including Robert Bly and Coleman Barks even though they don't know Persian. They did work with Persian, and they've done a very good job. I was very surprised because I didn't read the book before it went to press, but now I've read it. And they have done quite a good job. And if you want to know who Hafiz is, it is the best book out there.

Janet Conner Well, that stands to reason because Coleman's a little bit of a mystic. Robert Bly's... so even without the Persian language, they're still people who drop into truth, into love, into oneness.

Peter Booth Absolutely. Absolutely.

Janet Conner But that prayer from Meher Baba, can that be shared with the community?

Peter Booth Oh, yeah. Sure. Absolutely.

Janet Conner So would you send it to me as a PDF, and I'll make sure everybody gets it?

- Peter Booth I'll be most happy to.
- Janet Conner Oh, that will be just magnificent. So you've had a rather rich life here with our man Hafiz. Where is he taking you next?
- Peter Booth Oh, gee. One of the beauties of his poetry is every time I pick it up, I see greater depth, and I feel, again, it's transformative. Real spiritual poetry is transformative, and language that is transformative is the height of prayer and the height of mysticism and the height of prophesy. That's what it's supposed to do, and Hafiz is the master of it. So I'm always transformed. I am never bored. Whenever I have a spare moment, I will go back to him, and I'll go, "Oh my god. Look what he's doing. That's unbelievably beautiful."
- I used to have a Hafiz tutor when I was first in Iran, and he would read a couplet. He'd take his fist and pound it on the desk and go, "Kill me right this moment! It's too beautiful. I can't stand it."
- Janet Conner Oh. Because it is.
- Peter Booth It is. It is. It's the most exquisite poetry ever written. It's unbelievably exquisite. And the dimensions go on and on and on, and the revelations just pour out of him.
- Janet Conner So send us off with one more Hafiz love poem. What should we listen to as we say goodbye?
- Peter Booth Let me see. The dust on the Beloved's foot represents the lover after he has gone through the spiritual process. And Hafiz uses the symbol of a speck of dust to symbolize that two things are characteristic of God-realization: infinite, unlimited love—well, three things—finite, unlimited, individuality, and infinite humility because you experience the infinity of the love of God. So the speck on the Beloved's foot is the symbol for the lover after he has become God-realized, so Hafiz says,
- Although it is the sun of the heavens that is the light of the world, it is the dust of your foot that gives the eye of the sun its brightness because that speck of dust has the effulgence that is infinitely brighter than the sun.*
- Janet Conner Hmm. Too beautiful, too beautiful. You know members of this community—I don't want to call you listeners—members of this community that the beautiful Maureen Carter in Ontario, Canada takes these words and converts them into transcripts. If ever you wanted or needed a transcript for an episode of *Praying at the Speed of Love*, it's this episode with Peter Booth and Hafiz, *The Illuminated Hafiz*. So come to [janetconner.com/21](https://janetconner.com/21). If you forget the number, just come to [janetconner.com](https://janetconner.com) and click on [Podcasts](#). They're all there.
- And I've been taking copious notes, so there will be things that you can practice, bring to life, as a result of this conversation, the transcripts, of course. Click on Prayer Bag 21 to get an excerpt from *The Illuminated Hafiz*, but then please join

the community. We have a special, closed Facebook group where we are talking about *Praying at the Speed of Love*.

So I thank you, Peter, for your life's work. I thank Hafiz, and I thank everyone who has ever brought us Hafiz. I thank the girl that he fell in love with and then realized, "Oh no. I'm really falling in love with God."

I always end a *Praying at the Speed of Love* episode with one of the mystical prayers that has been given to me. That seems a little audacious right now; however, I must fulfill the promise I have made to Sophia, my Beloved, because she gave me this prayer on the Vernal Equinox [voice cracks].

It's called "This Moment." I didn't expect it. I was just sitting doing my deep soul writing, when I heard a noise, a very, very, very tiny noise. And finally it got my attention and draw me up from my writing, and I looked around the empty living room, trying to find this sound. I thought maybe there was a bug in the room with me. I followed the sound all the way outside the window, where I saw the first drops of rain on the pavers. I said to myself, "Oh look. It's raining," put my attention back on the page, and this came out verbatim.

*That first tinkle before I know it's rain...Amen  
That first breath before I know I'm awake...Amen  
That first sip before I know what I'm tasting...Amen  
That first sniff before I know I'm on fire...Amen*

*That first chord of silent music—  
I'm not sure I hear it  
Can't quite catch the tune  
But my heart knows it  
My heart knows it by heart*

*That spinning moment—  
When the clear road fades  
and then disappears  
But my feet keep walking  
I know not where*

*That dropping moment—  
When the floor between worlds cracks open  
I stumble, I trip  
I plummet, I land  
And everything, everything, everything has changed*

*That moment  
That moment when I know you are here*

*That moment when I realize you never left*

*One moment  
Our moment  
This moment*

*One moment  
Our moment  
This moment*

*I am beginning to remember what I never forgot  
Amen*

T. Frantzich This conversation in the mystic with *Prayer Artist* Janet Conner has been rated L.

[music] *You are not moving, you are being moved.  
You are not singing, you are being sung.  
You are not praying, you are being prayed  
Prayed at the speed of love.*