

Soul/Self/Spirit – by Rev. Mumtaz Kammerer, Siraj – Baltimore PA Universal Worship 2/9/25

We were three years into being domestic; living in Boston. I was awakened in the middle of the night being shaken and Richard's saying, "Who are you? Who ARE you!?" He then calmly rolled over and continued sleeping while I was wide awake and wondering what just happened. It's a good occasional exercise to ask "Who are you?" to one's self; to be a bit reflective and conduct self-assessment.

We're most often in the physical and mental realms when identifying ourselves. How do we usually introduce ourselves? We give our name and, dependent on the situation, what we do and some relatable tidbit so the person we're meeting has some idea of with whom they're dealing. "Hello. I'm Mumtaz. I volunteer here." "Hello. I'm Mumtaz. I live in Baltimore." It's pretty straightforward until we start considering who this "I" is. Who are you? Who is this I that has a name and lives on this planet?

The religions and spiritual paths all ask these questions of us. They want to help us go beyond mere existence into a deeper understanding and realization of who, and what, we truly are. This version by Daniel Ladinsky of a Hafiz poem with its poetic language and imagery gives some idea of this approach.

ALL THE HEMISPHERES

Leave the familiar for a while.
Let your senses and bodies stretch out

Like a welcomed season
Onto the meadows and shores and hills.

Open up to the Roof.
Make a new water-mark on your excitement
And love.

Like a blooming night flower,
Bestow your vital fragrance of happiness
And giving
Upon our intimate assembly.

Change rooms in your mind for a day.

All the hemispheres in existence
Lie beside an equator
In your heart.

Greet Yourself
In your thousand other forms
As you mount the hidden tide and travel
Back home.

All the hemispheres in heaven
Are sitting around a fire
Chatting

While stitching themselves together
Into the Great Circle inside of
You.

The Subject Tonight is Love - 60 Wild and Sweet Poems of Hafiz; Versions by Daniel James Ladinsky, Pumpkin House Press, 1996

“Change rooms in your mind for a day.” When we do this we can realize we are more than corporeal, thinking, emotive beings. We can come to an awareness of our soul-being. As the Hindu scripture today told us:

Find the eternal object of your quest within your soul. Enough have you wandered during the long period of your quest! Dark and weary must have been the ages of your searching in ignorance and groping in helplessness; at last when you turn your gaze inward, suddenly you realize that the bright light of faith and lasting truth was shining around you. With rapturous joy, you find the soul of the universe, the eternal object of your quest. Your searching mind at last finds the object of the search within your own heart. Your inner vision is illuminated by this new realization.

When we turn within, we can find the presence, mystery, and holiness that is our authentic self: the soul that is experiencing this life. This takes some effort and guidance too. As Inayat Khan advises: “Spiritual realization can be attained in one moment in rare cases, but generally a considerable time of preparation is needed.” The effort is to remove ourselves from the distractions we find around us. And the One, the Beloved, is available to help, always. Consider the Psalmist in listing the “benefits” from the Divine includes: “Who redeemeth thy life from the pit; Who

encompasseth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” The pit is whatever bogs us down, is a barrier, or holds us back; is those distractions that say, “Oh, I don’t have time to meditate, or pray, or do my practices.”

Then the benefits, the results, of getting in touch with one’s own soul is an expansive perspective and deeper understanding of life and its purpose. It’s getting in touch with the Divine. Let’s mash up some phrases from Paul’s letter to the Romans and the reading from the Quran we heard today to get a feel for this:

Everyone moved by the Spirit is a child of God. God created you. God knows the promptings of your soul, and is closer to you than the vein in your neck. And if we are children, we are heirs as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing his suffering so as to share his glory. It is God who ordains life and death. To God all shall return.

The religions and spiritual paths have the reassurance that God, the Divine, the Beloved, the One – whatever name might be used – is always accessible, available, pervasive and “encompasseth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” And “To God all shall return.”

When I first started thinking about this month’s Universal Worship, I was going to have the theme be “Amoeba.” Somehow this single-cell animal with its elastic outer container; with its moving, changing shape; with its complexity and simplicity made me envision my soul. While I may think I’m this body, or this thinking, or this feeling, I’m actually this vast, formless, uncontained Soul/Self/Spirit that the religions and spiritual paths are pointing me towards. So I’ll continue to do my practices, meditate, pray, and open myself up to the possibility as we heard in the Zoroastrian scripture:

And do Thou, O Divine Light! O Great Creator! Come to me, with Thy Creative Mind! And do Thou, Who bestoweth gifts through Thy Cosmic Order, bestow alike, long-lasting gifts upon me, and that this Life may be spent aright. Do Thou, by means of Thy lofty Words, bestow the powerful Spiritual help upon my teachers and upon me!

Who ARE you? We can live in the awareness of our soul quality. As Inayat Khan says, “The mystic does not wait until the hereafter, but does all possible to progress now.” The mystic – that’s all of us – wants to experience the Divine and bring spirituality into everyday life. Let’s close with some ecstatic sayings from Inayat

Khan that we can use as a practice, a prayer, a request, an affirmation to embrace and know Soul/Self/Spirit:

Unveil Thy face, Beloved, that I may behold Thy glorious vision.

Expand my heart, Lord, to the width of the sky, that the whole cosmos be reflected in my soul.

Let me forget myself, Lord, that I may become conscious of Thy Being.