

Akhi, the beggar sage, sits at the city gates, instructing all in the dance of life.

Ask Akhi...



Dear Akhi,

I have seen on public television small circles of men who dress like you, sitting around a small pot of thick, black coffee. Do you drink that stuff? I drink four cups a day, but it doesn't look like that!

—Addicted

Dear lover of the bean,

Akhi has little time to sit with those men drinking coffee. The few times I have done so, the strength of the drink was enough to clean out Akhi's insides within the hour. Akhi is not accustomed to anything so strong, so rich, or so expensive.

No, Akhi sits instead with those who grow the beans. They are families who have harvested coffee berries for several generations on the hillsides nearly two day's journey from where I sit. It used to be that they received a good return for their labors and they were able to come to the city and buy what they needed twice each year. They never failed to visit with me and share their good fortune.

Recently, though, they have been told that people all over the world are now growing coffee more cheaply, so the buyers refuse to give my friends what they deserve. These days, the growers receive only a few copper coins for what used to bring silver. Akhi finds this very strange. People in the city who drink their coffee pay more and more, and the poor who provide the beans earn less and less.

My friends on the hillsides used to dance every day. Now they are too tired. Many in the city have never danced at all. They just sit. Perhaps Akhi will go into the city and sit with them just long enough to tell them about the workers in the hills. I will take the coins they give me and bring them to the mountain made holy by the labor of my friends. It is a fair exchange. Is it not? The people in the city will then be lighter, and then they too can dance.

Be well. -- Akhi

[Akhi has learned that valuable information about falling coffee prices and the plight of many growers can be found through the InterReligious Task Force on Central America irtf@igc.org or at Equal Exchange at www.equalexchange.com. You can also write to Equal Exchange or purchase their coffee: 251 Revere Street, Canton MA 02021; (781) 830-0303.]

Spotlight On: Rev. Diane Walker

BS Board member



Involvement with Beacon Street: Vice president of the Beacon Street board.

Occupation: Ordained Presbyterian minister; chaplain at Metro Health Medical Center and at the Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital for Rehabilitation.

Family members: 4 cats: Abraham and Sarah (from the same litter); Felix (named for a former therapist) and Cleo (short for Cleopatra, who thinks she's a queen).

Currently reading: Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith, by Anne La Mont. Also enjoys Penelope Williams, author of Heart of the West and The Outsiders.

Hobbies: Reading and gardening. Her backyard is half perennials, she says. Black-eyed Susans, Yarrows and Holly Hocks are currently in bloom.

15 Minutes of Fame: Diane was featured in a July 29 article in the *Plain Dealer Magazine* on the pastoral care staff at Metro.

Best Thing About Working with Beacon Street: "Hearing how we reach out to people and touch their lives."