

Inner Call podcast #121 Who is the Guest? May 17 2021

In cultures all over the world, hospitality is considered a great virtue. To be warmly received deepens the connection between people, allowing acquaintance to turn into friendship and friendship to ripen into love. On the other hand, there is nothing that cools a relationship faster than a tepid reception under someone's roof. In some parts of the world it is customary to tell an arriving guest, 'This is your home,' and usually it is said not as a mere convention but with complete sincerity.

There is a poetic rendering of the zikar that relates to this. This sacred practice, repeated regularly by many, is often translated into English as 'There is no God but God,' but it is sometimes said this way: 'There is no God but the Guest within.' What a privilege, and what a responsibility to feel that the Divine Presence is lodging with us.

The more we think about this, the more it can transform our everyday experience. If we feel the silent caress of sunlight on our skin, we may begin to recognize that it is the Divine that savours the warmth; if we inhale the perfume of a rose, it is the Divine that contemplates the secret of the flower; if we take a morsel of bread, it is the Divine mind that embraces the generosity of the wheat. To strive to be the host of the Holy Visitor is a wonderful attunement, one that offers a lifetime of insights and riches.

But as we endeavour to fulfill our roles of hospitality, scrupulously tidying the house, always putting the wishes of the visitor before our own customary habits, we may sometimes catch a glint of amusement in the eye of our Divine guest – for in this situation, who is really the host, and who is the guest? We have not built the house we inhabit, and in spite of our assumptions, we are here for an uncertain time. At any moment we may be obliged to leave. Would it not be more accurate to say that we are the visitors?

If that is so, then we can start to learn a new skill – being a guest, a good guest. It is not very different from the role of host, but perhaps places more emphasis on gratitude.