

Inner Call Podcast #125 Are we idolaters? May 31 2021

In the brief passage about the divine art of music, posted in the Inner Call on May 27th, 2021, Hazrat Inayat Khan mentions the word idolatry. It isn't a term he used very often, and perhaps for that reason alone it is worth examining. Is idolatry something we need to guard against? Perhaps we think it is not – but perhaps we should think again.

The prophet Abraham, who was born Abram, grew up in the city of Ur, and according to tradition, his father kept a shop where he made and sold idols. One day, having to go away on business, the father left Abram to look after things. It seems, though, that Abram was not well suited to the trade. When a man came seeking to buy an idol, Abram asked him how old he was. The man replied that he was fifty, and Abram said, "You are fifty years old, and you will worship an idol that was made yesterday?" The man went away ashamed. There are numerous stories of a similar nature about young Abram – in all of them, he is searching for that which is beyond form, imperishable.

Hazrat Inayat Khan says that in every thought and word there is some idolatry, and that sound alone, being formless, can be called divine. The Master is not denouncing the arts and sciences, nor the grace manifested in Creation, far from it. He himself very much appreciated the beauty of poetry, for example, but as he points out elsewhere, when we mistake the form for the essence, when we see only the clay statue and forget the Infinite Divinity that it represents, we are misdirecting our attention. Then we risk falling into idolatry.

In our materialist age it is very easy to become intoxicated by form and lose sight of the One who is both the Maker of the form and its ultimate Animator and Resident. As a consequence, by our self-obsession it is now customary not to acquire idols from a shop, but to make idols of ourselves. Here is just one example out of many. The cataract of images on social media shows an enthusiastic worship of appearance without regard for the Reality behind it. With filters, we can alter every aspect of how we look, but not our essence, not our inner reality.

What there is no software for, no pre-set filter – and there can never be such – is to awaken the heart to its real purpose. When the heart is frozen, it is as if we are in our own tomb, but we were made to be alive. How to arise from that interment? That only comes when we discard the countless idols we have piled up around and on top of our altar, the heart.

In the grateful space thus created, any dust that remains is simply shaken away by the formless, living vibration of Truth.