

Inner Call Podcast #127 How to become perfect June 7 2021

Recently a group of friends had a conversation about perfection, and several remembered, as young children, being taught in church the counsel of Jesus: Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. It was advice that they somehow had been unable to connect to themselves or to their lives, and yet Hazrat Inayat Khan repeats this wisdom a number of times. So, if we would be good students, we could ask ourselves, what is perfection, and how are we supposed to become perfect?

When babies begin to walk, they do not think about perfection - they simply respond to a wordless impulse that pushes them up off the floor, and sends them, tottering and crowing with delight, across the room to the waiting arms of the mother or the father. The baby is not concerned with how well it is walking. As the years go by, though, successive accomplishments fall more and more under the shadow of expectations. Why didn't our team win more games? for example, or why wasn't I invited to the party? Why didn't I do better? As one person in the conversation put it, scoring 99 on an exam inevitably raised the embarrassing question – where did the other one percent go? In other words, we discover that there is both victory and something called failure, and no matter how well we do, life has a way of holding our failures under our nose, to remind us of our flawed nature.

We try to cope with this by focusing on the bright side and ignoring the shortcomings, by 'papering over the cracks in the plaster,' as the expression goes, but this is never very successful. Instead it leaves us with a chronic discomfort, because we have an *inherent* longing for perfection, meaning that if we cannot find it, we cannot be content. And whether we put it this way to ourselves or not, our journey on the spiritual path is nothing else than a search for perfection.

In the beginning, we search for our goal in external experiences – meeting special people or visiting special places, or accomplishing something remarkable. What happens outside ourselves, though, cannot satisfy our inner hunger. This is what Hazrat Inayat Khan is speaking of in this verse from Gayan Ragas :

*I searched, but I could not find Thee;
I called Thee aloud, standing on the minaret;
I rang the temple bell
with the rising and setting of the sun;
I bathed in the Ganges in vain;
I came back from Ka'ba disappointed;
I looked for Thee on earth;
I searched for Thee in the heaven, my Beloved,
but at last I have found Thee
hidden as a pearl in the shell of my heart.*

The perfection must be found within, then – but being conscious, as we are, of our limitations, this seems impossible. How could we proceed?

At the conclusion of the prayer Saum, we ask God to 'draw us closer to Thee every moment of our life, until in us be reflected Thy Grace, Thy Glory, Thy Wisdom, Thy Joy and Thy Peace.'

A key word here is 'reflected.' It means that our 'perfection' need not be ours – we need not invent a recipe for Divine Joy, or Divine Wisdom, for they are there, waiting. We only need to reflect them, like a mirror. And, as we know, the heart is made to reflect; if we focus our heart upon our own ego, there will be a muddy, disappointing image in the mirror, but if we forget ourselves – the cleaning of the rust from the mirror, as Hazrat Inayat calls it – and turn our heart toward the Divine Ideal, then our own heart will show us the perfection for which we have been searching all our life.