

Inner Call Podcast #128 Terms and Conditions June 10, 2021

A prayer is a way of giving shape to an ideal. The higher the ideal, the more difficult it is to grasp, but by the words of a prayer we drape a fine fabric around the ethereal and intangible, and in that way catch a glimpse of the One we hope to meet.

This is true in every tradition: Some Buddhists, for example, pray: *May all beings be free from pain...* It is a very generous hope, spreading the arms of compassion as wide as all of creation, including all consciousness, in whatever form. Or, when Christians ask Mother Mary to pray for them now and at the hour of their death, it is a hope for a future that is not weighed down by our own shortcomings and transgressions.

Of course, being good students on the path, we understand that repeating these words mechanically won't accomplish very much. It is important to say them with attention, with feeling – from the heart. But prayers, in a curious way, resemble web pages that we click through without much care, in that they have a button somewhere that we often don't notice that says 'terms and conditions apply.' In the prayer Salat, we pray that the Message of God may spread far and wide, thereby making all of us brothers and sisters in one single family. Since God is the Father, it must be a loving family and not one of the other kind, so this is a very appealing image – to return to the innocence and freshness of childhood, when we felt loved and love came spontaneously from our hearts. But if we think repeating the prayer, even with earnest longing, will be enough, if we are waiting for the day that our neighbors suddenly line up at our door, arms outstretched, and say with loving smiles, 'Hi, neighbor - we just realized – we are family!' then we might as well wait forever. The terms and conditions in this case require that *we* recognize the *neighbours* as sisters and brothers. They may respond to this recognition, or they may not – that is not our affair. For humanity to awaken to its essential unity, it has to begin somewhere, and where else could be better than in the heart of the one who is praying for that to happen?

So, here is an experiment – which could become in time a habit or a discipline – to scan through all the people in our environment, searching for the most unappetising, for the ones from whom we feel most distant, whom we dislike, or, if the feelings are strong, whom we hate, and say to ourselves, 'Regardless of what I feel, this is my brother or my sister; this person comes from the same Divine Source – that origin is all that gives meaning in life, and we have that in common.'

It is really not so difficult, and it doesn't sound like much, but just this simple acknowledgment could precipitate a profound change – first in our own inner landscape, and then – God willing! – in the world around us.