

Inner Call Podcast #135 Alone with a Friend Forever July 26 2021

“How do you feel about yourself?”

The conversation was turning around an intriguing, but in some ways confronting saying from Gayan Boulas : *To be alone with one's self is like being with a friend whose company will last forever.* What is confronting in this saying – perhaps – is the idea of eternity. We are so accustomed to going from one thing to another, so addicted to novelty and change, an addiction fed by our materialistic culture, where every sensation must be followed by another, new and different and still more impressive, that the prospect of being alone with a friend, even a very good friend, forever and ever might be daunting. Could our friendship with ourself stand the strain?

What is more, we often rely on our contacts with others to find ourselves – the average person tends to define him or herself by the people they know. If no one else is there, if we are the only person present – would we know who that person is? We might not know what to do with ourselves, as the expression goes.

And then there is the question of our shortcomings. No one is perfect, and the more we develop our sacred ideal, which is the essential foundation of the spiritual path, the less impressive does our assemblage of quirks and defects become. Surely the saying is not suggesting an eternity spent contemplating imperfection?

There are some who see in this saying the hope, or perhaps the promise, of at last being free from the irritating presence of other people. ‘I would be very happy to be by myself,’ they might say, ‘for other people are so disagreeable!’ But where is the disagreement? It is in ourselves, not in the other people, and being alone, even for all eternity, will not remove the seed of dissatisfaction.

To glimpse the pearl of wisdom in this saying, then, we need to understand what is meant by ‘self.’ Hazrat Inayat Khan is not speaking of the bubble-like self that floats for a moment upon the ocean of being. ‘Self’ can have two senses – one is the limited ego, and the other is the infinite self of the Only Being. And when the Beloved becomes our self, as the Master tells us, then the self is no more, or perhaps it becomes what it really is. And that would be a friend whose company we could enjoy forever.