

Inner Call Podcast #140 Avoiding Judgment August 27 2021

For many people, the anecdotes from the life of Hazrat Inayat Khan are like precious photos found in a box in the attic – to be studied with rapt attention, as we glean every fragment of information that we can from them. The exchange posted in the Inner Call as ‘Are all prophets equal?’ on August 25th is a rich example.

A lady had come to see Pir-o-Murshid Inayat, intent, apparently, on doing battle over a principle. We can imagine her, perhaps with a bowed and feathered hat, bustling forward like a bulldog. The lady is not identified, and from the way the story is told, it seems likely that she was not a mureed. Her way of speaking suggests that she may have been English, but whatever her origins she had a strong belief, one that viewed religion as a zero-sum game. In other words, if one faith wins, another faith must lose; for one religion to be correct, all others must be false.

Pir-o-Murshid’s response to her confrontation is humble and breathtakingly graceful, using the words of the lady’s own Saviour, Jesus, to excuse himself from judging one teacher to be superior to another. And perhaps, when we read his words, we stop and think, “Yes, who am I to judge a prophet, or teacher or faith?”

There is a difference, which we often overlook, between perception and judgment. Perception relates to our experience, whereas judgment is based upon comparison. We can safely say, “This teaching is very inspiring to me,” or “I find much light in those words,” but in order to judge, we must be sure we know all about whatever it is we wish to compare. In the material world, where it is possible to weigh and measure and calculate, we can say with certainty that one lamp is brighter than another, or that this basket will carry more than that one, but when it comes to judging people – of any sort – what we are able to perceive is only a small portion of what lies beneath the surface. As for illuminated souls, to judge one to be superior to another means to claim to stand above both, in order to weigh the value of each. It is, to put it mildly, a presumptuous attitude that shows ignorance rather than superiority.

We can wonder if the pearl of wisdom that Pir-o-Murshid Inayat offered to the lady had any effect upon her life. The consequences are not recorded, but we can hope that she went away with a wider understanding.

If we also wish to profit from this pearl, we could try, just for a day, to avoid judging those around us, regardless of how we perceive their behavior.