

Inner Call Podcast #141 Turning Blame to Praise September 1 2021

Like good students of the Sufi path, we discovered various points of view, all of them valid, when we began to discuss the phrase from Vadan, “My conscientious self: judge not another by your own law.” Through various reflections, we found a consensus that passing judgment on others is a regrettable but universal tendency, and the world would be a better place if we could get over that.

It is possible, of course, to make positive judgments. The jury members of a competition, for example – whether it be for the most artistic performance of a sonata by Chopin or a selection of home baking at the local Harvest Fair – are looking to find excellence and celebrate it. But for many of us, condemnation, spoken or unspoken, is such a well-used habit that it flows automatically, whereas the offering of praise or admiration seems to require a conscious effort. If we would exert ourselves, though, and look for things to praise in those around us, in a very short time it would make a surprising change in ourselves, and also in our environment.

In our discussion it was also pointed out that ‘Love is above law,’ as Hazrat Inayat Khan says, and if this is so, perhaps we should eliminate not only our judging but also the laws that enable it. Laws express limits, and we are striving for the limitless, so let’s just throw them out.

It is a wonderful ideal, but before we discard anything, it is always wise to ask if it might serve some purpose that we had not recognized. To live in love, for love and by love is the ultimate goal but we cannot begin there. We have to begin at the beginning, with some preparation.

The saying from the Vadan is one of the Copper Rules, and therefore part of the series of admonitions that begins with rules of Iron and ends in the precious realm of Gold. These rules first address us in our most dense condition, and then, as we (hopefully) develop, help us to expand and unfold, to show the beauty that is possible in the human personality. One very basic Iron rule, for example, is “Do not boast of your good deeds.” One Golden rule, obviously on a higher level, is “Observe constancy in love.”

Copper, being a step above iron, suggests a stage when one has begun to work on oneself. Perhaps, having done some self-examination and feeling dissatisfied with myself, I have begun to set certain standards or laws for my behavior, expectations of myself that I try to fulfil. Self-discipline is admirable, in fact essential for our development, and obviously discarding laws in this case would not be helpful.

Nevertheless, as this saying tells us, we must beware of judging others by our rule. We have little idea where another might be in their own journey – perhaps they are far ahead of us, or perhaps they are still sleeping. In either case they deserve respect.

What is more, judging – in the sense of condemning – is simply not good for us. It leaves a sour taste in the mouth. The habit of condemnation and blame in time permeates our feeling, our thought and even our body; it is easy to see on some faces.

Much better, therefore, to cultivate the habit of admiration, for when it is sincere and genuine, it gives life and light and sweetness. And we all need that.