

## Inner Call Podcast #142 What is generosity? September 20, 2021

When we met to share our thoughts about 'generosity,' it is safe to say that there were uncertainties troubling some minds. All could agree that to be generous is surely a good quality. We admire generosity when we see it and experience it, but when it comes to being generous ourselves, the question that might arise is, how far are we supposed to go? Generosity means giving, doesn't it? But the needs of the world are much greater than whatever we possess; we have only to open our eyes to find ourselves gazing at a wide ocean of need, and all our resources are no more than a handful of sand. We could throw in everything and come away empty handed without filling the sea. So, what is the point? Or is it that we are obliged to give away everything if we wish to follow a spiritual path?

What is more, we might on some occasion want to be generous, but we rebel if we feel we are being exploited. We all know of people or circumstances that would suck us dry, given the opportunity, and never say a word of thanks. Is it spiritual to be a passive victim in this way? With these uneasy thoughts, therefore, there were some who came rather gingerly to our conversation around the 'virtual fireplace'.

What does Hazrat Inayat Khan tell us about the subject? In one lecture, in the 'Character Building' portion of volume III, he offers a characteristically warm and inspiring description of generosity, saying that it builds a path all the way to God. He is careful to tell us, though, that to be generous does not necessarily mean to be always spending money. Rather, it is an attitude, an attitude that can show in all that we think, say and do. Although this quality is sometimes described as 'charity,' as for example in the Bible, in Hazrat Inayat's view, generosity really means nobility.

This is a term that is not used much anymore, for we think we live in another system now; the mostly vanished rules of aristocracy ascribed nobility according to one's birth – to be the child of a regal family set one's place in the world, but nobility also implied a certain duty to preserve the dignity of one's position. We can think of the expression, 'noblesse oblige,' meaning that with rank came responsibilities.

The nobility of the Sufi, though, reaches much higher than one's biological parents or grandparents, or even one's grandparents for many generations, for the one who has touched reality knows that all – every single being on this planet – are children of the same Divine Father. Race, wealth, nation, or social position make no difference, for it is the same divine Light and Life that animates us all. When one becomes truly aware of this, it awakens an innate nobility, and then the generosity of which Hazrat Inayat speaks may be shown in merely a word, a glance, a smile, or even a compassionate silence.

A wonderful example of this generosity can be seen in the anecdote of Hazrat Inayat greeting the workman digging in the street, as it was told by Murshid Hidayat – it was posted in the Inner Call on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016, with the title 'The Hand of the Workman.' On that long-ago rainy day in Suresnes, the Pir-o-Murshid did no more than to lift his hat and courteously offer his hand to the muddy workman, but as Hidayat found out decades later, the greeting and the kind look gave that laborer something that lasted all his life.

We can only give what we have, but when we are aware of our divine heritage, then the infinite rests in our hearts, and that is a treasure house that can never be emptied. To let that richness find its place within, though, we have to begin by opening the doors and learning to give whatever we can. As it says in Gayan Chalas, 'The absence of generosity means that the doors of the heart are closed; nothing from within can come out, and nothing from without can enter in.' When we give, however small the gift may be, it helps to build the path to the Divine.