

## **Inner Call Podcast #146 About Expectations and Hope October 23 2021**

If I go to visit someone I know, a friend or a member of the family for example, because of our relationship I go with expectations concerning how I will be received, although I may be unaware of them unless, to my surprise, they are unfulfilled. If my reception is outside of my expectations, I may be confused or disappointed or upset – or perhaps touched and charmed – but my way of seeing the world will have been shifted in some way. To expect is to look for, to anticipate, but it has also acquired a sense of something settled, something that we see coming toward us, and that we feel we can count upon. In the English language, we may say that a woman who is pregnant is ‘expecting.’ The birth in some months’ time is more or less a foregone conclusion.

Because of that apparent reliability, our small self, the ‘me’ that thinks it is independent of the universe, tends to seek shelter in a comfortable nest of expectations. Whether they are well-founded or flimsy and paper-thin, we rely on them to screen off from our view the churning, storming ocean of possibilities that surrounds us. Therefore, the disasters that befall everyone, the sudden illnesses, the accidents, the fires and floods and storms and earthquakes and all the rest, can be doubly devastating. To lose all one’s possessions in a fire, for example, is difficult, but to be also left asking, “Without my goods, without my home, who am I now?” is much more challenging.

The word hope, on the other hand, gives a very different way of looking forward. It doesn’t convey the same feeling of self-satisfying assuredness as an expectation, but a hope lifts our spirits. It is like the glimpse of sky through the window of a prisoner’s cell. It tells us there is something to reach for, and some scholars have said that the word hope is related to ‘hop,’ meaning to jump or leap. In other words, hope drives us upward, arms stretched, hands reaching for the heavens. When we take a hope into ourselves and it penetrates our will, it becomes an aspiration – and ‘aspire’ is a very spiritual word, for in its root it means to send one’s breath toward something.

Every life should have some goal, some place towards which we send our breath. If this is neglected, we throw away the precious opportunity that life has given us. In Vadan Talas we can read, “To live means to hope, and to hope means to live.” A life without hope is only a shadow of life.

Some may say that they hoped for something and were disappointed, and that the disappointment has left them feeling bitter toward life. They would rather not hope than face such disappointment again. But this tells us not that we must avoid hope, but that we must know how to hope – and that is the work of wisdom, which grows as our heart grows wider.

If we place our hope in the world of illusion, then sooner or later our dreams will be broken. Rather than grieve over disappointment, we should look still higher, to some place beyond the rise and fall of fortune. Listening to wisdom we could, for example, direct our gaze according to this saying from Gayan Boudha: If in truth we shall not build our hope, in what shall we build?

Ask yourself, then, are you building a hope? And most importantly – where are you building it?