

Inner Call Podcast #148 Treating the Disease November 3 2021

While this is being recorded, there is a gathering underway in Glasgow urgently focused on plans to reduce climate change. The need is great, for we are already experiencing disastrous alterations in weather patterns, and there is a real possibility that some parts of the world will become uninhabitable. Some island countries could simply disappear, and millions of people could be displaced from their traditional homes. As is so often the case when there is an emergency, it is the poorest who would suffer most.

The conference is negotiating practical measures, such as limiting the output of carbon dioxide and methane, but in medical terms, this might be described as treating the symptoms without addressing the disease. If a patient arrives at the hospital suffering from a drug overdose, the first actions obviously must be to counter the effects of the substance – to deal with the symptoms that threaten the patient's life. But if there is no attention to the illness – of mind or of spirit – that led to the overdose, that person will most likely lurch from one calamity to another, never knowing real health.

Looking beyond the symptoms of climate change, then, what is the illness of the world? A Sufi might say it is the lack of a sacred ideal.

There are still traces of old cultures around the world that treat all of creation as sacred – that feel that the earth, the sky, the waters, and all the living creatures deserve respect because of their sacred origin. It was once a universal ideal, although the expression of the ideal naturally varied from region to region, just as ways of cooking will vary according to what ingredients are available.

In Gayan Boulas Hazrat Inayat Khan observed that, “The present spirit of humanity has commercialism as its crown and materialism as its throne.” Such a spirit has no place for the spiritual, a truly paradoxical and self-defeating condition. The God ideal, for many people, has become like some antique notion, quaint and outdated, and no longer thought to be useful in our supposedly improved and modern society. The general attitude now is that ‘god’ has no connection with real life – but God is life, and keeping such a view before us hides the truth from our own eyes.

In the third of the Sufi thoughts, we can read “There is one Holy Book, the sacred manuscript of nature, which truly enlightens all readers.” Therefore, the more we study nature – and not merely the forests and the mountains and the seas but our own nature as well, the more we will begin to glimpse the Divine impulse and the sacred artistry that has brought it all into being. With that study, our divine ideal will grow, and as it grows, our study of nature will become more illuminating. At last, we will perhaps come to understand that the divine ideal is not an invented fiction, but is also a part of creation. It is natural to reach upward; every infant does it, and we should make that a living part of our life.

As it says in Gayan Chalas, “The God-ideal is the flower of creation, and the realization of truth is its fragrance.”