

Inner Call Podcast #150 Facts, white lies and truth December 3 2021

A group of friends recently had a conversation about the realization of truth, a subject to which Hazrat Inayat Khan devoted great attention. As truth is our very being, and there is nothing beyond Truth, it would seem natural that we should do all we can to make truth a reality in our lives. And yet if we reflect upon it with care, we must admit that we seem to wander constantly in a world of illusion, enticed one way and pushed another by meaningless promises and baseless fantasies. In addition to the fundamental questions of existence that have always challenged mankind since the paleolithic and perhaps before, questions such as 'who am I?' and 'what is the purpose of life?', today we also have to fight our way through a luxuriantly thick and clinging veil of materialism. One sensorial experience after another dazzles our awareness, and then fades away, leaving us ever more hungry and dissatisfied. The unreliable cannot be truth, so where can we go to find the true?

Truth is not something we can create, nor can we acquire it – if it is truth indeed, it must already exist – here, now and always – but to recognize it we must first awaken a love for it, and do all we can to live a truthful life. That is what it is to tread a spiritual path, and in the course of that journey, we must learn the difference between truth and fact, for in the understanding of the Sufi these two can be quite different. In Vadan Boulas, we read, "As pleasure is the shadow of happiness, so fact is the shadow of truth." And we also read there, "Fact is a covering over truth." Fact, like pleasure, belongs to the outer world, whereas truth, like happiness, is found within. Fact may hint at truth, but it may also conceal it and lead us astray.

This helps to make sense of the moral puzzle we sometime face when we encounter a situation in which it seems wrong to tell the truth. We are taught to live a truthful life – one of the ten commandments warns us not to tell lies about others – but anyone who tries to apply this teaching in every circumstance will certainly face dilemmas. What shall we do if what we know will be hurtful to someone? Must we abandon our endeavor to live a truthful life?

In English we speak of 'telling a white lie,' meaning to conceal something unpleasant under a falsehood. It might appear to go against a sacred principle, but in the view of a mystic love and beauty are higher expressions of truth than are many unkind facts. Therefore, a white lie might be closer to the truth, more living, than the fact it disguises. Also in the Vadan we find, "When facts fall dead, truth comes to life."

One wise person once said that before we permit a word to reach our lips, it should first be examined by three guardians, each with the power to stop the word's passage. The first should ask, 'Is it true?' The second should ask, 'Is it necessary?' And the third? The third guardian should ask, 'Is it kind?'