

Inner Call Podcast #151 Will and Surrender December 7 2021

A two year-old child engaged in a temper tantrum is difficult to pick up. The little body only weights ten or twelve kilos, but it is so many kilos of fully activated anger, rejection, frustration and separation. The arms and legs flail, the back arches away from any comfort. With screams and tears the tantrum demands total attention, and yet totally rejects contact because allowing an embrace would mean surrender.

It is a growth phase, of course. At other phases of our life, we look for the opposite, we seek to be held – by another person, or by an experience. For many people, the most restorative experience is to surrender to the rays of the sun on a warm beach. But these forms of surrender are conditional. If the embrace is not of our choosing, or if the beach is not to our liking – too noisy, perhaps, or too full of litter – our surrender will be revoked.

This interplay between will and surrender is also seen in our spiritual life. Some restless longing works in us, and we begin to search even before we know we are a seeker. Using our will, we hunt for what will satisfy that emptiness. Like shoppers in an immense fashion mall, we try one garment after another, helped perhaps by the promptings of friends. ‘Try this. This might look good on you.’

Notwithstanding their help, though, it is not what we put on that will ease that need, it is what we let go. The spiritual need is the desire to be one, again. Since infancy we have experienced what it is to be a separate individual, but despite its intoxication there are always disappointments arising from separation. And we have tried on various forms of surrender – but conditional surrender is inevitably incomplete, and also leads to disappointments.

Then, what does surrender mean in a spiritual sense? Surrender how? And to what or to Whom? Religious authorities may offer suggestions : find your peace in God, or Allah, or Yahweh, or Krishna. But if ‘God’ is no more than a word for us, we may bow before that word a thousand times and never feel embraced. Only when we have used our will to focus our awareness, to sift through our consciousness for the traces of what seems ideal to us, and when those traces touch each other and merge like a magic puzzle, will that ideal begin to come to life.

One clue to this process is in the prayer Saum, in these lines : “Thy Beauty do we worship, to Thee do we give willing surrender.” Beauty awakens love, but for many people, beauty is a concept confined within certain conventions, and what falls outside those limitations leaves them unmoved. Divine beauty, though, should be all pervading, and if we let our awareness become finer, gently or vigorously putting aside whatever weighs us down, we will start to find beauty everywhere, even in the space between our thoughts.

It may be a lifelong journey, but enlarging our recognition of the beautiful prepares us to really surrender to the Creator of all Beauty. When we can wholeheartedly make that prostration, and when we feel our surrender accepted by the embrace of unconditional love, then there is no more to be said or done. We will have reached at last the home we have been looking for.