

Inner Call Podcast #154 The Thorns of Life February 1, 2022

One of the fundamental consequences of living in the material world is that we constantly assess all our experiences by means of comparisons. 'I like this flavor more than that one.' 'These shoes are tighter than those ones.' 'That person is more kind than this one.' And so on. And of course once we start comparing, because we like to simplify things when we can, it is very easy to take a short cut and to become polarized in our judgments, to push everything to one end of the spectrum or the other, to say that everything on this side is good and everything on that side is bad. There are people, things, experiences that I like, and everything else that I don't like. There is light and there is dark.

But what about the inevitable tones of grey, the mixtures of sweet and bitter or of rough and smooth? Think, for example, of the rose, the legendary symbol of beauty so often celebrated by poets and artists. Its blushing, tender petals and its beguiling perfume whisper of the mysteries of love and hint at the promises of heaven. But roses also put forth thorns that can draw blood from an unwary hand, so while we would like to put the rose at one end of our scale, the thorns appear to belong at the other end.

The Gayan, speaking of this, says, "The gardener uses roses in the flower bed and thorns in making the hedge." From a spiritual point of view, nothing can be discounted; all things have some purpose. One may say that the ultimate purpose of the plant is to produce the seed that will form a new plant, but that is not a journey of a single step. There must be a tender flower from which the seed may form; there must be a branch that will support the flower; the branch must be protected with hard thorns, and so on. And it is the wise gardener, or in other words, the one who has mastery over a situation, who finds the harmony in all the aspects.

We can also apply the lesson of the parts of the rose to our understanding of God. In popular speech we use the word 'divine' to mean anything good: 'How was the concert?' 'Oh, divine!' And if we didn't like the music, we would use another word. But the Invocation speaks of "The Only Being," and we hear in the Zikar this affirmation, 'God alone exists, none exists save He.' This tells us that the Divine is never absent, and so all that comes our way, the parts that we enjoy and the parts that are painful, have their place in the Divine harmony.

If we look only at the thorns, or only at the rose, we will miss the design of the gardener. Respecting the place of the difficult as well as the sweet is a fine way of growing beyond our own small, self-centered assumptions. And after all, sometimes that is the real purpose of the thorns of life.