

Inner Call Podcast #160 How do you walk on water? March 17 2022

We commonly set the limit of human endeavour at the water's edge: people, like virtually all creatures larger than insects, can walk on land, but not on water. That is why the miracle of Jesus advancing across the Sea of Galilee, to the astonishment of his disciples who thought at first they were seeing a ghost, seems to be a proof of the Master's divinity. It was upon witnessing this that the disciples worshipped Jesus as the Son of God, something they had not done before. But is it an ability really out of reach for us ordinary mortals? According to the gospel of Matthew, Peter, swept up in the moment and invited by his Teacher to "Come!", managed a few shaky steps before he recollected where he was and sank. Does it mean that this is something we could strive for?

In Sufism, no classes are offered in 'water-walking' – although in our age they would surely be an instant on-line marketing success – but in Vadan Alankaras, we do find this: "*Teach me, Lord, to tread upon the sea of life.*" Why does Pir-o-Murshid Inayat call life a sea? Because it is large? Perhaps. Nothing can make us feel so small as the wide horizon of the sea, and life has no limits either. The sea is also opaque; from the surface we have little idea of what might be concealed in the depths; our attention might be caught without warning by the silver flash of a fish or the surging bulk and the wise eye of a whale, if not something more sinister. That also sounds like life. What is more, the sea is a challenge to navigate. It took early civilizations a long time to work out how to find their way around once they were out of sight of land. Perhaps more significantly, it is not stable in the way that land is. The sea is affected by tides, and currents, and waves that rise and fall, and there are sudden changes of wind, and storms that strike without mercy. Thinking of all these qualities, we can easily agree that the sea is an excellent metaphor for life, and 'treading' on the sea' must mean mastering all that life can throw at us. But the saying asks that we be taught – that tells us there is something to learn, but what? And how do we learn it?

If we are pitched into the sea, there are three possible consequences: we may sink, we may float, or if we have learned what is necessary, we can stand on top of the waves. To sink means that we are in the grip of 'the denseness of the earth,' and unless something changes, we are heading like a sinking ship toward the sea-floor. To float is better; it means we find some kinship with the sea – but the waves can still toss us around for we are not in control of our situation. To walk on the waves means that we have discovered something of the sky in our nature, a vertical connection that lifts us above the turmoil of the sea. This might make us remember the flying heart, which is able to soar upward when it is responsive to the light of guidance.

In Gayan Gamakas, there are these lines : '*... when I withdraw my real self from the false, I know all things, and yet stand remote; so I rise above all changes of life.*' What we must learn, then, to tread upon the ever-changing waves of life, is to distinguish our real self from our false. One clue is that it is the real self that reaches upward. The two wings of the heart are indifference – meaning lack of concern for what we cannot change – and independence. It is by continually exercising these wings, like a little fledgling bird learning to fly, that they become strong enough to bear our weight. Sooner or later, the moment of lift-off arrives.