

Inner Call Podcast #163 The Real Maturity April 20 2022

Every parent knows the frustratingly deep abyss between the idealized form of how we wish the children to be and the wild, untamed reality that they manifest. “Kids are wonderful – when they’re asleep,” is only half a joke. And in the same way, we often feel frustrated about our own progress on the spiritual path. There are moments of inspiration, of deep insight into life, of real beauty and sublime peace – and then there are moments when we look in the mirror and ask ourselves, “How could I have done – or said, or thought – that?” We could add, “The Sufi path is wonderful – if only I could follow it!”

We can never really be certain of our own spiritual condition, but we may take hope for ourselves by observing the way that children grow. A child of ten years, for example, can be an angel one moment, and in the next a being with a pitchfork and a tail; one instant generous, the next selfish, and so on. A desperate parent might think, “Will this child ever learn?” And yet the child is certainly growing and maturing – she or he is no longer six years old. That stage, which was like a mountain peak of accomplishment at the time, is long forgotten. And the stress points, the issues that produced the storms in the life of the six-year old are also gone – now there are other, ‘older’ battles and tensions.

In other words, the child is growing, just as nature intended. In the same way, our inner growth is natural. If we give light and air to the plant of the spirit and water it with love – the love of beauty, the love of our ideal – it will grow as it was intended to do. If we become obsessed with our lack of development, it only holds us back.

Above all, one of the signs of growth, whether of a child or of a seeker on the spiritual path, is a widening horizon. From the foot of the tree, we can see a certain distance, but as we climb up through the branches, more and more is revealed to us. Our progress on the path is similar. Momentary conditions may vary – some days we are more peaceful, some days more stormy – but our view encompasses more than it did before. And remember, what we behold we do become.

There is also a natural ripening at work. Under the warm touch of the sun, the hard, green fruit slowly becomes sweeter, and the branches bend under the weight of the crop, putting it in reach of the passer-by. The true measure of our inner growth is not only in how tall we grow, but in how much fruit we offer. There is a warning for us in this saying from Gayan Chalas: *A fruitless life is a useless life.* In the orchard, the fruit trees give unconditionally, without asking the merit of the one who plucks an apple or a pear, and without concern what use may be made of what has been taken. Each year it will give again, without regard for what becomes of its fruit, for it has been made for that. Give what you can, and while you can, then, without agenda, and leave the enjoyment of your fruits to others – for that is the real maturity.