

Inner Call Podcast #165 Open Your Eyes May 10 2022

As this podcast is being recorded, a number of cherags and candidate cherags are engaged in a systematic study of the Universal Worship, the religious ceremony that Hazrat Inayat Khan offered as a way for us to celebrate our oneness. Although simple in appearance, the service is very subtle, and a whole lifetime would not be enough to realize all the wisdom that it embodies. One aspect that is particularly important is that of symbolism – the art of the prophets that manages to capture the whole ocean in a drop.

Cultures take their form from symbols, flowing around them as a river flows around the aspiring and inspiring peaks of the earth. If we don't look up and study the landscape, though, we no longer notice the symbols – until we encounter those from another culture and we are brought up short. After our initial surprise, when we look more closely, we may discover that while the form is strange to us, the meaning is familiar.

For example, in many cultures there are sacred images with multiple faces, or an unusual number of eyes, images that may strike the modern view as unrealistic. Egyptian deities such as Atun and Bes were sometimes depicted with multiple eyes. The Hindu god Brahma has four faces, each one looking in a different direction. The now commonly recognized concept of a third eye enabling supernatural sight is not confined to the yogic tradition – it has even been seen in one statue of the Greek god Zeus. There is also a legend that the god Indra, having sheltered under the wing of a peacock, rewarded it with a thousand eyes, visible upon the feathers of its outspread tail. What could be the meaning of so many eyes in these spiritual representations?

The eye usually indicates awareness, and therefore having many eyes would suggest unlimited awareness, or all-pervading consciousness. A materialistic point of view sees all matter as inert, and human consciousness as a strange fluke of nature, difficult to explain – perhaps, it is sometimes surmised, a consequence of the elaborate architecture of the jelly between our ears. To the mystic, though, consciousness is eternal and unlimited, and existed before the creation of form. We touch on this truth when we repeat the prayer Saum, which describes God as omnipresent and all-pervading.

It is our deluded dream that our awareness is somehow separate and independent from the ocean of consciousness, a dream in which we take refuge, but which is also the source of all our suffering. If we were less absorbed in the tiny details of the small self, we would see further. We go about our daily life assuming that our thoughts are our own, but what we call our individuality is only temporary. Perhaps we could think of the life of a tide pool on the shore of the ocean: while the tide is out, the pool appears to be a separate little kingdom, but when the tide rises, the pool returns to its state of oneness with the sea. That image falls short of the reality, though, for here and now we are not separate from the One – as we would discover if we would only open our eyes, all our eyes, and look.