

Inner Call Podcast #166 Reflections of the Beloved May 13 2022

We were discussing a very beautiful verse from Gayan Ragas : *I dare not think of raising mine eyes to behold Thy glorious vision; I sit quietly by the lake of my heart, watching in it Thine image reflected.*

As we soon discovered, beauty touches each person in a unique way, and the different interpretations of this verse were most illuminating. One aspect upon which several members of the circle commented was the idea of not daring to look directly at God, perhaps from respect, perhaps from awe. The verse does not explicitly say so, but there is a suggestion that to look directly at the Divine radiance would be as perilous as to look directly at the sun.

This might make us think of the story told in Exodus, of Moses asking God to show him His glory. Moses had already such an intimacy with the Divine that they spoke together as close friends, but the prophet evidently yearned to know his lord still better. God warned him, though, that no one could look upon His face and live. This expresses a very mystical idea, which Sufis understand as, 'I am not, Thou art,' an affirmation repeated countless times in the zikar, or in other words, that the individual self must be forgotten in order for the Divine Self to be known. To return to the image of the sun, looking at God would blind the mortal 'I' or ego.

But God answered the desire of Moses with a sort of stratagem, that when He was walking in the garden in the evening – we can imagine a blessed time of coolness and peace after the heat of a middle-eastern day – Moses would be permitted to see God's back. One metaphysical understanding of this is that Moses was allowed to recognize the Divine in His creation, in His Garden. It is logical that God must be present in all names and forms, for He is infinite and all-pervading, but when we look about us, we are often unmoved by what we see. Our own small gardens may be pleasant, but even a contemplation of our best rose doesn't usually overwhelm us with a transcendent, ego-shattering vision of God. In order to make place for such an experience, we must use the mirror of the heart to see.

Looking into the face of a loved one – the face of a child, perhaps – we can certainly be filled with wonder, and feel the divine in the moment. It is more challenging to keep that awareness when we look away and observe more prosaic surroundings. Do we see the divine in the gate-post, as a Zen master once asked a pair of perplexed soldiers standing at the gate of a monastery? If we are only thinking about gates, then probably not. But if we have done some inner work, and have begun to know the taste of Divine grace, it may be different. If we have cleared away the debris floating upon the surface of the lake – the lake of the heart, that is – it will give a beautiful reflection of everything, for that is its true purpose. And we will then find the divine shining everywhere.