

Inner Call Podcast #167 Look Up May 26 2022

There is a kind of circle in which seekers sometimes find themselves trapped: doing our prayers and practices, we become more sensitive; inspired, we glimpse bright, intoxicating flashes of beauty, and perhaps, overwhelmed, we indulge in a fleeting thought of, 'wow, am I finally illuminated?'; then even before the glow fades we trip and stumble in our daily life, giving way to some undesirable impulse. Now disappointed in ourselves, we fall into a period of gloom – the sunlight that filled our hearts for a moment has disappeared from view. When we have spent enough time in the pit of despair, we climb out, throw ourselves once more into our spiritual work, and the whole cycle begins again.

If this sounds even slightly familiar, there is a Buddhist teaching story that could help. It tells us that a spiritual teacher travelling through the forest comes upon a man beside a pond. The man is covered with mud, soaking wet, and exhausted. The teacher asks the man what has happened, and he explains that he has seen some gold in the pond – but no matter how he searches in the muddy bottom, he is unable to find it. "Perhaps I can help you to find this treasure," says the teacher. "Let us sit quietly and see what happens."

The teacher and the man sit by the pond, and time passes. The water, which had been churned to a muddy froth by the frantic searches of the man, slowly clears and becomes still. After a while, they look in the pond, and sure enough, there is the image of something golden! But before the man can dive into the water to retrieve the gold, the teacher restrains him, and then points upward. Looking into the tree above them, the man discovers that he has been seeing a reflection – the real gold is hanging in the branches of the tree. In order to possess it, he must climb.

Our consciousness is made for reflection. Very often what we take for 'reality' is a reflected impression received from somewhere else, from our physical senses, perhaps, or from some other mind. Then we think about the impression, and then we have a memory of thinking about it, and one reflection quickly becomes many. That is why Hazrat Inayat Khan called the mind a palace of mirrors. The same mirroring principle applies to the deeper part of consciousness, which we call the heart. For the average person, the heart is directed to the outer world, and this gives a suffocating impression of limitation. By effort and grace, though, the heart can be turned to the inner world, and then our horizon expands.

It is not surprising, therefore, that reflection is mentioned several times in our Sufi prayers. In the prayer Saum, we ask to be drawn closer to the Divine Presence until 'in us be reflected Thy Grace, Thy Glory, Thy Wisdom, Thy Joy and Thy Peace.' And in the prayer Salat, we ask the Spirit of Guidance to "let the star of the divine light shining in Thy heart be reflected in the hearts of Thy devotees."

Think of your heart, then, as a pool. Don't worry about the mud at the bottom – sediment is natural to every body of water, but what matters is the reflection of the realms above. Just be still and look upward. The real treasure is hanging there, waiting for you to grasp it.