

Inner Call Podcast #168 Joy and Sorrow May 28 2022

When we started our conversation, it was not long before the terrain changed, and like explorers following the winding course of a river, we found ourselves travelling in an unexpected direction. This is natural in matters of the spirit, where, for example, the search for liberty quickly brings us up against the rockface of the need for discipline, and the lush riches of the world, on examination, turn out to be no more than a shimmering mirage.

In this case, we were discussing a phrase from Vadan Boulas : Do not enjoy life more than life allows you to enjoy it; if so, your joy will turn into sorrow. It was not difficult to reach a consensus that Hazrat Inayat Khan is speaking about balance and moderation, and the necessity to accept the rough with the smooth. If a fisherman catches many fish in his net, he should not try to draw in more than his boat will carry; giving way to greed risks losing everything – fish, boat and even life itself.

But as we looked more at the phrase, it became apparent that for many people, the problem is not the uncontrolled pursuit of enjoyment, but the difficulty of enjoying that which life does offer us. One may feel the burden of many duties, for example – work, family, and countless other obligations – to such an extent that one is always in the rhythm of doing, and never in the rhythm of receiving. Beset by expectations of oneself, we may become blind to the here and now. Or one may have suffered a great loss that leaves one sorrowing, plunged in a sadness from which it seems impossible to emerge. In such cases, to speak of enjoyment only makes one feel more inadequate, for it is common to blame oneself when one suffers – misplaced guilt, certainly, but common, nevertheless.

Shortly after we ended our conversation and wished each other a warm good night, Hazrat Inayat Khan as it were, added one more word on the subject. A copy of his unpublished sayings fell open at this entry from one of his notebooks, from 1921: Sorrow tunes a person to a higher pitch.

Why should this be so? Probably because in sorrow we have to let go of much of what we assumed was 'ours'. And since our Murshid speaks of 'tuning,' we might remember the opening lines from Mevlana Rumi's Masnavi, about the plaintive call of the flute. The green reed was plucked from its bed in the marsh, dried, scraped empty and pierced, so that the breath of the musician could vibrate within it.

We could understand from this that the only refuge from sorrow, and from the hardness of life, is in the living breath of the Divine, the loving breath that constantly surrounds us, and wishes to find some note in us that we have not yet recognized. That note is our true purpose in life, and to sound it at last is to know our own nature, which is happiness itself. Surrendering to that tuning, we begin to glimpse the meaning of this verse from Nirtan Talas:

Befool not, O night, the morn will break;
beware O darkness, the sun will shine;
be not vain, O mist, it will once more be clear;
my sorrow, forget not, once again joy will arise.