

Podcast #172 The Mystery of Pride July 25 2022

The recent post of an anecdote about Hazrat Inayat Khan caused surprise in some readers, and understandably so. The entry on July 17th in the Glimpses section related that when a family member – probably a brother, wishing to dissuade Inayat from overburdening himself to fulfil some duty – gently suggested that he would be acting from pride, the Master replied, ‘It is all one has.’

His words are surprising because we usually associate pride with some of the less desirable aspects of human behavior, a quality that we should strive to leave behind as we journey toward spiritual perfection. How can it be that Hazrat Inayat here not only admits to acting from pride, but even asserts that it is all we have? If we understand the matter in the right way, though, the answer gives us a deep insight into our own nature.

In the dictionary, pride is defined as ‘deep pleasure or satisfaction with one’s own accomplishments,’ and in a related sense, the consciousness of one’s own dignity – of one’s worth. It is commonly asserted that to recognize our spirituality we have to get beyond the tyranny of our ego, and it is true that an inflamed ego (an illness so common it should be declared a pandemic) often presents itself in very unbeautiful displays of pride such as conceit, self-assertion, ostentation, arrogance, vanity, and even cruelty. On the other hand, those who have made some progress on the path show qualities of gentleness, simplicity and humility that seem far away from pride. But the clue to the mystery is in what each one considers to be an accomplishment.

The materialist, for example, may think that his worth is summed up by the number and value of possessions, or if he is intoxicated by power, by his position in society: the more people that stand below him, the greater does he feel, and the more self-satisfied. The mystic has a different view of life, considering, perhaps, that it is a great accomplishment to have covered his small self from his own view, so that the greatness of the One Being can be more clearly seen. There might also be deep satisfaction in seeing one’s ideal come to life, and in offering whatever service one can to that ideal. When one serves from love, as opposed to compulsion, it is natural to feel pride in that service. Each of these, the egotist and the mystic, will know a form of pride, but the pride of the worldly person will be dense and limited, whereas the pride of the mystic will arise from that which cannot be taken away – for it dwells in the eternal. In Gayan Suras we find : It is Thou who art my pride; when I realize my limited self, I feel myself the humblest of all living beings.

It is very common to think of ‘us down here’ and ‘God up there,’ but if we try to separate human behavior from the Divine, we won’t get very far in our journey toward the One. Putting God far above our human feelings, we are living in a form of duality. But God is never absent; He is nearer to us than our own body, and the Divine Presence experiences all that happens in the universe: as we love, so does God also love; as God feels compassion, so do we also experience compassion. The same is true of pride; if we find satisfaction in our accomplishments, how could we expect that God would not also feel such satisfaction? But the satisfaction will be more complete when our self-assertion is less.