

Inner Call Podcast #171 Knocking on the Gate July 18 2022

In Gayan Boulas, we find this saying : *The heart is the gate of God; as soon as you knock upon it, the answer comes.* The words are very encouraging – we always warm up to any piece of wisdom that mentions the heart, and this seems to offer us the hope of instant gratification from the Divine. That should be a very welcome and perhaps surprising promise, for who has not prayed for something, at one time or another, and felt our prayers to be unanswered?

The image of knocking is not a new one. According to the Gospel, Jesus said, “Knock and it shall be opened to you.” Probably from the days when humans first built a few huts together in the wilderness we have known this concept of going to someone’s door or gate for help. We might need food or healing or consolation or shelter or just a helping hand with a heavy load, but something has forced us out of the comfort of our usual place. And, humans being humans, we know that through history the gates and doors have not always opened to the knock of need, a call that might come in the middle of the night, or at some other inopportune moment, or when we just don’t feel generous. But the phrase from the Gayan and the promise of Jesus both assert, without conditions or reservations, that God will respond when we knock.

What is more, the saying from the Gayan even tells us where to knock. The gate is located in the human heart. There are many tales about seekers crossing deserts, climbing mountains and penetrating jungles in search of spiritual truth, but apparently we need not go so far – it isn’t an external journey at all. It does seem paradoxical, though, that we should have to knock upon our own heart, and we might ask why is this so?

To understand this, we could ask ourselves, ‘Is my heart open right now?’ This is a trick question, because anyone who answers ‘yes’ probably fails the test. The further one goes on the spiritual journey, the more one feels there is yet work to do, and one wishes that one’s heart would open still more. Hazrat Inayat Khan tells us that life in the material world is difficult, and from our preoccupations with possessions and sensations and our own identity, the heart becomes frozen. Then the liquid quality becomes paralyzed; the fountain of love that should be flowing there is stopped. In that case, if we were to knock, what answer could we expect to hear from the Divine Presence within?

Some may say that loving is so perilous that they need to protect the heart; they loved and were hurt, and now they keep a shield in place to avoid more pain. But this confuses love with attachment and expectation. Love is the sense of unity: we love the beauty of the rose because its softness and grace and perfume speak of something we have within, something that we recognize – but while loving the rose I should not demand that it unfold a certain way or show a certain colour or refrain from producing thorns, and any such agenda will probably lead to disappointment. If that is painful to me, the source of the pain is not in the rose, nor in the love I felt, but in my expectations.

There are many ways of warming up the heart – the practice of Zikar is one – but any effort that we make to think less about ourselves, and more about a living ideal will be helpful. If we do this with patience, persistence and conviction, it will in time become a reality, and then we may echo these words from Gayan Tanas: *My heart is no longer mine since Thou hast made it Thy dwelling place, my Lord.*