

BEING AND BECOMING

Spirituality is about being not about talking. We can talk all we want, but unless we become, talking is of no consequence. There are certain individuals who have become what they talk about, and in that case the spoken word carries the resonance of reality. This is an extraordinary phenomenon; if we can sit with someone who has entered reality there is an opportunity to learn something from the words themselves, but if the words come from a person who does not exist in that reality the words are of little consequence.

There is a story about a prayer leader who was reciting the Qur'an one day. He happened to be a man who had memorized the whole Qur'an. On this occasion someone was sitting in the assembly listening to him, looking at him, sometimes smiling happily and sometimes making faces and noises as if something was wrong. When he had finished his recitation he came up to that person, "I saw your displeasure with some of what I recited, and I saw you smile in other places. If you think you can do better, why don't you? Here is a Qur'an."

The man replied, "I can't do that, I don't know how to read."

The leader of the prayers said, "Why are you showing signs of displeasure when you don't even know how to read?"

The man answered, "Well when I looked at you, some of the time as you recited I saw the light of God's plenitude coming from your mouth. At other times, when it wasn't there, I showed my displeasure." The man fell and kissed his hand. Even with the recitation of holy words there must be a resonance, a specific state of consciousness for a

true impact, a true understanding to come through, for the words to resonate the grace they have.

There was a man who wanted to find Khidr Nabī, a being known as the eternal prophet. The man sat imagining him for days until finally he drew a picture of Khidr Nabī on a piece of paper, folded it up and put it in his shirt pocket. Then he walked around everywhere asking all the people he met if they knew who Khidr Nabī was. One day he ran into a man who said, “I am Khidr Nabī.”

The man took his picture out, looked at it and said, “No you’re not!” and walked away. Because of his preconceived notion, his entrenched imagination, he had missed the opportunity to find the real Khidr Nabī.

To enter the spiritual path and truly begin to understand it, we have to begin by finding ourself, by knowing ourself. Most people in the world have spent a long time imagining who they are, and then one night they draw a picture of themselves, fold it up and stick it deep in the recesses of their mind. This is who they become, and every time they have a chance to discover who they truly are, they check this new version against the picture they have drawn. When it fails to match they keep going.

In our present state we are incapable of finding spirituality unless we conclude we have something new to find, unless we understand we have to change something, unless we understand we need to be transformed. But the question is, how does this transformation occur? The transformation cannot occur as long as we have a picture of ourself folded up neatly in our shirt pocket or lodged deeply in the recesses of our mind. When we do that we are limited by our own imagination, limited by a picture we have

drawn of ourself, we cannot go any farther because we have established the parameters of growth defining existence, the parameters of our capacity to be.

To find out who we really are we have to break through the understanding of these limits, these parameters. This is difficult because most people have no idea what lies beyond that imaginary description of themselves, no understanding of where there is to go because they do not have the courage to step into the unknown. The first thing to do when we begin the journey to find our true self is burn the image, this picture of ourself, throw it in the fire. If that picture lies deep within us we have to step into the fire, something it takes great courage to do. It means something must die, our notion of who we are must die, and the death of our imagined self is impossible for us to comprehend while we live in illusion.

Early in the twentieth century during World War I, there was a major battle in Turkey at Gallipoli when Ataturk, the Turkish leader, formed an army to hold off the Europeans. He told his recruits, "I am not asking you to fight, I am asking you to die." He needed men who were willing to give up their lives to save the country. In the same way, we have to be willing to give up our imaginary lives to save our souls. This is the choice we are given, not a path for cowards because there will be a death here, the death of all we have conceived, all we have imagined, all we have held dear, of everything we have considered to be reality before setting out on this journey to the truth, all that must die.

How do we take such a journey, how do we become what we have not been before, how do we become this other being which comes into existence when the imaginary being we are now has died? How does this happen? If we do not find someone who lives in reality to show us the possible, we will be incapable of conceiving it, limited

as we are by our own imagination, by what we think we know. Since we hold so strongly to our beliefs, our conjectures, to what we think is real, we need someone with the ability to release us from these ideas. The only person who can do this for us is someone who has already done it for himself or herself, and then that person becomes a mirror for our own possibility.

Even if we discover such a being, we are still required to take some positive, affirming action, we have to be engaged, we must make an effort, an effort which begins with stopping. We need to stop being the way we are, a difficult thing to do. A train traveling at one hundred miles an hour heading south has to put on its brakes and stop before it can turn around to go north. Putting on the brakes at this speed is a serious business, the train squeals and screeches, throwing off sparks, it takes extraordinary effort. We have to apply our own brakes in the same way, go through all that screeching, throwing off sparks as we stop going in the direction we have been traveling our whole life, as we turn around and proceed in a new direction. Once we stop we can at least sit still, sit without the momentum of the world pushing and pulling us in every imaginable direction.

When I first met a great holy being all I could do was sit in front of him and be amazed, fascinated by what I was sitting with. Fortunately, I was able to sit without conjecture, sit without trying to figure out what he was talking about, without trying to understand what he was saying to me, without trying to make sense of all the things I had never heard before. It was sufficient for me to be in his presence, sufficient to be in the presence of those qualities which are reality, a transforming process which went on for an extended period of time, an actively engaged, actively passive effort. I did this because I

was so convinced something positive would come of it, so convinced inwardly I was able to put forth the effort to be at his feet and sit still.

To begin the spiritual path a certain kind of humility must develop, the humility to stop, to surrender, the humility to understand that we do not know. As long as we are certain we know we remain the enemy of our soul; as long as we think we are controlling the world we are the enemy of our soul; as long as we know where we are going we cannot go there because we have a preconceived idea of each step, we have drawn a picture, we are merely following the outline produced by our imagination. We have to stop conceptualizing in order to enter the open space, a space in which we do not know what will happen, in which we are ready to stand with our eyes open, without fear, accepting what we see with humility, awed by the glory, unafraid of being burned, stepping willingly into the fire of reality.

We go as volunteers to give up illusion for the sake of our soul, a major step, a step for our state of being, a step towards finding reality. Until we take this step everything else we do is merely imagination, until we take this step we are talking without becoming, conjecturing without becoming, we are drawing pictures of reality instead of stepping into it.

If we are serious about this path we have to learn to bow our heads to its truth, learn to put our heads appropriately on the ground, humble in the understanding that we do not understand, humble enough to beg for the grace which is only His to give, humble enough to ask that guides be sent to us each step of the way. We must surrender to God and give up this world. We must lose our sense of self, our illusory sense of self must

dissipate and be reborn in His will, in His qualities; we must be lost to the world, nothing more than a burned out shell to the world.