

KNOWING OURSELF

If a penguin wanted to be an eagle it would be difficult because its characteristics are not suitable for eagles, but they are suitable for penguins which have been given attributes making it possible to do what penguins have to do. As an eagle, a penguin would be a failure, not only a failure but an extremely frustrated failure. Similarly, if an eagle wanted to be a penguin it would be tough for the eagle. Can you see an eagle surviving in the Arctic, diving under water to look for fish? It would not work, it would be nothing but a failure.

In the same way, in our lives we have to understand who and what we are, what is suitable for us. We have our specific nature, we have all been given certain gifts. We have to understand the gifts we have been given, and we have to know them. Imagine if an excellent carpenter wanted to be a physicist—it would be difficult and frustrating. If a painter wanted to be a singer, if a singer wanted to be a painter we have to be sufficiently in touch with ourself to understand the natural flow of who we are, where that natural flow goes, what it has difficulty with.

The ability to stay within what God has given us is something we need to understand, staying with the gifts given to us by God is something we truly need to understand. When we cannot do that or when we will not do that, we find ourself in the endless frustration of trying to be something we are not. We need to learn how to know ourself. It is not imperative to learn the nature of others, especially before we know ourself, but it is imperative to be satisfied with ourself and what we are, instead of trying to change what we discover ourself to be.

This happens with children. Parents insist they develop one way when they are clearly developing another way. When children have a certain natural talent parents sometimes have other ideas for them, then the children are frustrated, sometimes growing up with difficulties because they are pushed where they cannot go, where they are unwilling to go or just do not easily go. Certain things are permissible and other things are not, there are things which are allowed to happen and things which are not. When things are permitted there is a natural, easy flow.

This does not mean effort is not involved, it means there is appropriate effort. Some effort is appropriate and some is inappropriate; when we are tangled in inappropriate effort we are fighting our natural self. Scheming is inappropriate effort; jealousy, going after things which are not ours is inappropriate effort; envy, looking at others, wanting what they have and putting effort into acquiring what they have is inappropriate effort. Appropriate effort is to make oneself better, being satisfied with what goes on, with what happens. Understanding this is important. If we try to develop ourselves in inappropriate ways, as we put out effort in inappropriate ways, we end by creating blocks between ourselves and reality. Reality opens for us in the way God intended, but if we continue to put incorrect patterns or limits on who we are, on what we are and what we want, if we proceed in ways which are not natural for us, we are moved farther and farther from reality, and this is not natural.

What is natural for us is the flow to reality. There is a flow in the universe, there is a way things go smoothly and a way they do not. For a salmon it is sometimes appropriate to swim upstream, for most people however, this is difficult. When we want to carve a route for ourselves from place to place, we try to create ways which do not

require swimming upstream. We need to know which way the current goes and move with it instead of against it.

When we move with the current and become part of it, things open up for us; when we oppose the current things close down for us. This does not necessarily have implications for the world; there are people who go against the grain, against themselves, who are treacherous and scheming with great effectiveness in the world. Nevertheless this is not what is important. They might have success in the world that way, but they have developed qualities which cut them off from reality. We need to become human beings who know ourself and our own nature.

The prophets, the holy books and the great holy beings have told us that to know ourself is to know our Creator. If we create a false self derived from worldly ideas we are never going to know ourself. By doing this we create a substitute reality which closes the door to our true self. And what is our true self? Our true self means to be the vice-regent of God. If we are so busy chasing worldly titles, worldly honors, worldly situations, we lose our rightful position as the vice-regent of God. This does not mean we should not make an effort in worldly situations, this does not mean we should withdraw from the world, it means we have to act within the range of the permissible for ourself.

The general rules of permissibility have been laid down, but each of us should understand what is individually permissible as well, what works for us, what does not work for us, and what can tell us better than the things our own inclinations tell us? We need to follow our inclinations, we need to be true to our inner core, we need to know that inner core. While we are learning how this inner core functions sometimes it is easier for us to recognize it in other people before we can examine our own. We need to

understand, in this worldly way, that there are differences which do not matter. Some people are meant to do *a*, some people are meant to do *b*, some people are meant to be opera singers and some people are not. We need to differentiate between this worldly existence and our true self. If we do not accommodate our worldly existence in the right way, if we do not flow with our worldly existence in the right way, we can be kept from understanding the true nature of our existence.

At this stage of existence, this illusory passage we are traveling through, this stage from birth to death, we live in two worlds. We live in the world of flesh and sometimes in the world of spirit. Since we live in both worlds, and the world of the flesh has an enormous impact on the soul, we have to be careful about what we do to the soul for the sake of the flesh.

The worldly chase for gold, land, titles, power and honors runs contrary to our true self, this chase takes us farther and farther from our true self. We must understand the grace of our true self, it must be our priority. We must understand the nature of this existence and the different kinds of creation, we must understand that each of us is individual, each of us has certain facets which are different from someone else's. This does not make us significantly different, it just means in the world of the flesh we have been faceted differently. Someone who is dexterous can do things which others cannot, this does not make them better or others worse, it is just the way things are.

We need to accept the way things are, we need to take advantage of what we have been given instead of fighting for something which is not ours. We need to know instinctively what we have been given, the gifts which are ours, which are much greater than we can imagine. But if we construct these gifts in our mind, if we imagine these gifts

we limit ourself. If we develop concepts of who we are from our thoughts we limit ourself because we are beyond our imagination. The gifts available to us are beyond imagination, the grace He has placed in us is beyond imagination; we need to stop limiting our understanding. When we stop fighting the natural way of things, that grace opens up, that grace can be seen. When we learn to be closer to ourself by moving along with the things that are appropriate for us, we are closer to the truth of ourself. As we are closer to the truth of ourself we are closer to the truth of God.

This does not necessarily mean we do not have to work hard. There is a tradition which says trust in God but tie up your camel. We have to do our own duty in the world, not the duty prescribed for others; we need to learn the duty prescribed for ourself, recognizing that each of us is given a different prescription. Understanding our prescribed duty is important, trying to do the duty prescribed for someone else makes us ill. We need to be tuned to ourself, not fighting it but accepting it. Acceptance is one of our tests, the ability to accept who we are, who other people are, accepting them for who they are. This is a test which works two ways. If we cannot accept ourself we cannot accept anyone else, we are a roadblock for ourself and other people, a roadblock between ourself and God. It all begins with fighting against what is appropriate; we need to understand our true nature and rejoice in it.

Freeing ourself from the things the world expects of us, that our parents expect of us, freeing ourself from what we think we ought to be, guiding ourself to what we actually already are, all this is a major step on the spiritual path even though it occurs in the flesh. We have to understand that inner connection, and as we are closer to knowing ourself, God willing we are closer to knowing our Lord. This is the glory, the mission of

our lives, the reason for our existence, the reason for creation. If we ignore this, if we do not look at it squarely, we have missed the purpose of our existence, we have missed the purpose of our life.

We need to look at ourself and be satisfied, satisfied with what we have been given, content with the self we discover. God lives in contentment, God lives in peace, He lives in mercy, He lives in compassion. When satisfaction with that self is available we are capable of entering His qualities, these are some of the gifts we are given. By accepting these gifts and living in these gifts we become an aid, not merely to ourself but to all humanity, we become a cupbearer for the qualities which accompany us. When we meet others we share that cup because our lives are shared, God is shared. We share God with our friends and companions. Is there a greater meaning in our life, is there a greater purpose for our life? This happens only if we know ourself, it happens only if we are true to ourself, only if we are content with who we are, with what we are and what has been given to us.

May God let each of us stand in that place of contentment, find that place of peace, understand the immaculate spot reserved for us where His grace exists, a specific place which exists everywhere if we understand ourself.