



Judgment and Understanding
Summer School 2009, Katwijk, NL
Presented by: Murshida Nuria Stephanie Sabato
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Note: Use the singing bowl to set contemplative atmosphere.

A few weeks ago my husband, Joe, and I ordered Chinese food from a local restaurant in Kansas City. When we finished our meal, I opened my fortune cookie, here is what is said: “You believe in the goodness of mankind.”

I thought this was as much a question as a statement. “You believe in the goodness of mankind?” To me these words formed a kind of paradox or a puzzle for it put me face to face with my own judgments about our world today, and mankind’s contribution towards our world. While there is always evidence of the goodness of mankind, we also witness in our external world much evidence to the contrary.

These thoughts relate directly to this year’s summer school theme of “Judgment and Understanding”.

In the Bowl of Saki we find the words of Our Master, Hazrat Inayat Khan, “*True justice cannot be perceived until the veil of selfishness has been removed from the eyes.*”

The words “true justice” seemed to hold a resounding echo for me, and so the journey into preparing this lecture began.

Years ago one of Hazrat Inayat Khan’s students asked this question? *“Will you please speak about the justice of God's judgment?”*

Hazrat Inayat Khan answered. *“By giving you a little simile I will show you what a difference there is between man's justice and God's justice. There are children of the same father and they are quarreling over their toys. The children have reasons to quarrel over their toys. One child thinks a certain toy is more attractive: and says, “Why should I not possess it?” The other child says, “That toy was given to me: why should I not hold on to it” Both children have their reasons and both are just, but the father's justice is different from the children’s view of justice. The father has not only given the children the toys to play with, but at the same time he knows what is the character of each child and what the father wishes to bring out of each child, and whether that particular toy will help to bring out what the father wishes to come out. The child does not know this. It happens perhaps that the toy seems poor to the one child and according to that child’s sense of justice he cannot understand why that toy was given to him and not given to the other child. If the child was older he would have accused the father of injustice, but he does not know the justice of his father. The child has to grow to that stage of evolution where his father is in order to understand the meaning behind.”⁽¹⁾*

At times we ourselves are like these little children questioning the actions and justice of God? Murshid himself says, *“There is no one who could be accused*

so often and for so many things as God. The reason is that it is our limited self which judges, though it is quite unable to understand.”⁽²⁾

Another student asks Murshid: *“Is it not very difficult to avoid judging? For in order to become just one has to come to a certain conclusion.”*

Hazrat Inayat Khan responds: *“Yes, but what man generally does is not only that he judges anyone in the mind – he is very ready to give his judgment out. He is not patient enough to wait and analyze the matter and think more about it. As a rule a person is not only ready to judge, but also without any restraint on his part he is ready to express his judgment instantly. He will not think, 'Have I the right to judge that person? Have I risen to that state of evolution?' – when Jesus Christ himself refused to judge and said, 'Whoever is faultless – it is that person's place to accuse or to punish'. It teaches a great lesson: even in order to learn justice it is not necessary that we should be ready to judge and instantly to express our judgment, our opinion.”⁽³⁾*

So we can glean from this response that Hazrat Inayat Khan is trying to give us indications in discerning between justice, judgment, and our personal opinion.

Let us turn to the instructions given within the Message for our answers. Murshid teaches, *“All tragedy of life, all misery and inharmony are caused by one thing and that is lack of understanding. Lack of understanding comes from lack of penetration. The one who does not see from the point of view from which he ought to see becomes disappointed because he cannot*

understand. It is not for the outer world to help us to understand life better; it is we ourselves who should help ourselves to understand it better”. ⁽⁴⁾

Shall I read this passage again?

I think it is very significant in its content, meaning, and its instruction. *“All tragedy of life, all misery and inharmony are caused by one thing and that is lack of understanding. Lack of understanding comes from lack of penetration. The one who does not see from the point of view from which he ought to see becomes disappointed because he cannot understand. It is not for the outer world to help us to understand life better; it is we ourselves who should help ourselves to understand it better”.* ⁽⁵⁾

The key here is, that *“all misery in life comes from a lack of understanding”* and that *“lack of understanding comes from lack of penetration”*, and it is our responsibility to train ourselves to understand life better.

If we examine our minds in all circumstances, we can begin to determine if we are merely exercising an opinion, passing judgment, or truly seeking justice. But now the question is, how do we honestly examine our minds in our effort to seek understanding and *“true justice”*?

Here Murshid is giving us the answer. Through *“penetration”*!

Now we have to ask, how can we develop the art penetration? Our minds are so often active – even overactive – life has so many demands. Our mind

so rarely stilled, we find ourselves constantly navigating choppy waters and in doing so our equilibrium may be lost. This in turn can lead us to feeling lack of patience, which gives rise to misunderstandings that ultimately lead to our feeling isolated, separated, and alienated because of our own judgments. Or the judgments we feel from others upon us.

Here at Summer School we are given the beautiful opportunity to still ourselves, time for introspection, time for opening, time for sharing with others. Such opportunities are essential and useful in developing the art of penetration that can lead to a place of greater understanding.

So how do we cultivate the way of penetration leading to greater understanding? Two qualities are required to develop penetration – just two. The first an open unhindered mind that possesses a childlike natural curiosity. This openness is a freedom from self-imposed restrictions and habitual patterns. The second quality is concentrated effort. Concentrated effort helps us to overcome our habitual patterns. The habitual patterns that keep us caught reliving a stale life of tired repeated scenarios. Concentrated effort opens the way for vividness and freshness in meeting everything we encounter anew.

Murshid teaches in this regard: *“When the mind is troubled it is confused. It cannot reflect anything. It is the stillness of mind that makes one capable of receiving impressions and of reflecting them. In Persian the mind is called a mirror. Everything in front of the mirror appears in it; but when [the object] is taken away the mirror is clear. It does not remain. It remains in the mirror as long as the mirror is focused on it, and so it is with the mind.”*

“The quality in the mind which makes it still at times and active at other times, which makes it reflect what it sees at one time and makes it avoid every reflection at another so that no outer reflection can touch it, this quality develops by concentration, contemplation, and meditation. The mind is trained by the master-trainer by diving deep, by soaring high, by expanding widely, and by centralizing the mind on one idea. And once the mind is mastered a person becomes a master of life.”⁽⁶⁾

May I read this quote again?

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Hazrat Inayat Khan further instructs us, *“Then there is a further awakening which is a continuation of what I have called the awakening of the soul. The sign of it is that the awakened person throws a light, the light of his soul, upon every person and every object and sees that object, that*

condition in this light. It is his own soul, which becomes a torch in his hand, it is his own light that illuminates his path. It is just like throwing a searchlight upon dark corners, which one did not see before, and the corners become clear and illuminated again. It is like throwing light upon problems that one did not understand at first; it is like seeing with x-rays persons who were a riddle before.” (6)

So let us take a little time here to reflect on this teaching in a form of a meditation that can lead us to penetrating more deeply and shining light on some situation or person who we might have a judgment about in our lives. I invite you to close your eyes and gently turn within. Look deeply into your heart and call forth something in your life, which you wish to gain greater clarity and insight. Use this situation as the “object of concentration”. Remain open and free of all judgments. Observe the body and the breath. Let the body remain subtle and the breath relaxed. Using the breath allow yourself to go deeper beyond the surface and into the heart of the matter. With an open heart, allow yourself to feel relaxed. Remain restful – yet awake. No judgment, no opinion, just open awareness.

Note: allow some time for silence.

Continuing to breathe. Use the breath to open the door to the chamber of the heart and windows of the mind and go deeper and deeper.

Here we can use lines from the Sufi Prayers by Hazrat Inayat Khan on the swing of breath, as a fikr, to support our concentration and to go deeper into this meditation.

Breathing in, silently repeat these words: *“Pour Upon us Thy Love and Thy Light.”*

While holding the breath, repeat silently: *“Disclose to us Thy Divine Light, that we may know and understand life better.”*

Breathing out, silently repeat: *“Guide us on the Path of Thy Own Goodness.”*

See the light of your own soul shining light on the situation or person, bringing all into illuminated awareness. With the radiance of an awakened, illuminated soul, without any judgment, ask these questions and await the response, “What is the great lesson for me in this situation? What is the great blessing emerging out of this situation?” Let your soul’s inner radiance shed light upon the situation. Breathe and listen.

Note: Use singing bowl to come out of meditation.

Were you able to penetrate deeper into this situation just by stilling the mind and using the breath as your guide to a greater understanding? I hope so.

Friday’s Sacred Reading highlighted the value of using the breath in our concentration practices. We heard: *“The man who knows how to breathe and how to communicate with his soul begins to realize that the universe is within himself, and it is through realizing the universe in himself that man comes to real spirituality.”* ⁽⁷⁾

Hazrat Inayat Khan also teaches us that, *“The outer life can be illustrated by man’s justice [which] is covered by his limited experience in life, by his favor and disfavor, by his preconceived ideas, by the learning he has which is nothing compared to the knowledge of God.”*⁽⁸⁾

“[The] inner life is something which is within oneself. It has been called a chamber of divine light in one’s heart. The door remains closed until an effort is made to open it. Everything becomes spiritual once this door of the chamber of the heart is open.”⁽⁹⁾

Let me give you a little example from my own life regarding judgment and understanding, and how moving from the outer appearances of a situation and penetrating deeper into the matter, my heart was opened to a particular situation.

While living in the Himalayan Region of Dharmasala, India in the mid-1990’s I frequently encountered the beggars of the village. As you may know beggars are both very curious and very observant, and this allows them to identify anyone new in their surroundings. Of course, these newcomers are, for the beggars, their prime clientele because newcomers have not yet become desensitized or hardened to the beggars presence and their unyielding requests for money.

On the surface, those of us visiting from the West are just objects of the beggars’ concentration. The beggars artfully observe and position themselves outside restaurants, shops and temples. After all what reasonable or sensitive person can refuse the sorrowful face of a bandaged leper or a rag tattered

mother with a child at her breast? Especially after one has just eaten, shopped, or prayed! With much well developed finesse the beggars observations and methods usually produce profitable results!

Of course, we may all have our judgments about their methods and whether or not they are truly as destitute as their appearance indicates, but here is where my story takes a turn towards a personal and inner journey.

As the beggars in Dharamsala were observing me; I in turn began observing them. One day as I was walking up the mountain from Lower Dharamsala to my residence in Upper Dharamsala I could see the beggars far ahead on their descent down the mountain road. What I observed was a very jolly, happy group of people all talking and laughing and sharing together. I said to my companions, “Ah, it must have been a good and profitable day for the beggars! Look, look how happy they all are!”

Armed with my own observations of the beggars, both while they begged in the streets, and now, in their natural interactions with each other, I was able to penetrate, for a glimpse, another view of these beggars. As the beggars approached and they saw us, their entire manner changed. They began to take on the pitiful manner of begging which they played out day after day in the streets of Dharamsala. But in this moment I was not to be fooled! As we walked closer and closer to each other their begging gestures became more and more dramatic. Do you want to know what I did in response to their begging? Shall I tell you? I turned the tables and I began to beg from them using their own techniques! Would you like to know what happened next?

The beggars began to laugh and laugh, and they even began to pull coins from their pockets and give me money! So the whole situation absolutely reversed itself.

In that moment, myself, the beggar, my companions, the mountain, the sky, everything melted into a feeling of union. We were no longer beggars and western visitors. We were people sharing, and laughing, and smiling, and humorously engaged! This single act of observance and penetration opened the doorway that connected our lives and opened hearts to each other. We were no longer separate. It was like finding a bridge in our understanding of each other as human beings. From that moment until now we all call each other brothers and sisters, and we have come to know of each other's lives and conditions. My leper friends have been very generous in educating me about this disease and have helped me to overcome my judgments about leprosy – my judgments about the disease because of my own lack of understanding.

I have also come to learn more of the family dynamics of the women who are put on the streets to beg; these women live with the threat of physical abuse from their husbands if they come home empty handed. We have since become friends, know each other's names, write to each other, and share our lives a bit with each other. And when we see each other we no longer live separated through our judgments. We have been fortunate to penetrate the barrier of self and other which has allowed us to all learn and grow and benefit from each other.

Another example, even better than my own, in the book “*Once upon a time...*”⁽¹⁰⁾ Pir-o-Murshid Hidayat recalls one day walking through the gate of Fazal Manzil holding his father’s hand. There in front of their house was a workman digging a deep ditch in the pouring rain. The workman’s hands and clothes were covered with mud. Murshid Hidayat tells us that his Father, Hazrat Inayat Khan walked towards the workman, Our Master took off his hat, and offered his hand to shake the hand of the workman. The workman was completely spellbound by being greeted in such a dignified manner by such a kingly figure.

Murshid Hidayat recalls that as Hazrat Inayat Khan turned and walked a few more steps down the road there were some his mureeds who were waiting and who had witnessed what had happened. Instead of the mureeds showing a feeling of understanding of this beautiful example of sympathy and kindness demonstrated by their Murshid they said, “*But Murshid, you can’t do that in the West. Don’t you know that you are not supposed to shake hands with a workman?*” To this Murshid responded, “*Are we not all children of one and the same Father?*”⁽¹¹⁾

This beautiful lesson of Hazrat Inayat Khan harkens to the teaching, “*For the Sufi who sees in every form the divine form, in every heart the divine shrine, to judge anyone, whatever be his position, his action, his condition, is altogether against his religion...*”⁽¹²⁾

In Bowl of Saki we find, “*The more elevated the soul, the broader the outlook.*”⁽¹³⁾

And last, from the Unity of Religious Ideals we are taught, *“Think of the life of the great Master Jesus... one sees that from beginning to end there was nothing but love and forgiveness [in the manner of Jesus]. The best expression of love is that love which is expressed in forgiveness. Those who came with their wrongs, errors, imperfections, all was forgiven; for there was always a stream of love which always purified.”* ⁽¹⁴⁾

“The lover of goodness loves every little sign of goodness. He overlooks the faults and fills up the gaps by pouring out love and supplying that which is lacking. This is real nobility of soul. Religion, prayer, and worship, are all intended to ennoble the soul, not to make it narrow, sectarian or bigoted. One cannot arrive at true nobility of spirit if one is not prepared to forgive the imperfections of human nature. For all men, whether worthy or unworthy, require forgiveness, and only in this way can one rise above the lack of harmony and beauty.” ⁽¹⁵⁾

May God bless us all with hearts full of love and forgiveness.

May God grace us with hearts overflowing with such greatness, so much so, that this outpouring of love fills all gaps. May our outlook, inspired and informed with the Message, guide us to an elevated consciousness of greater understanding and the sublime reality of God’s true justice.

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QUOTATION REFERENCES

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- (2) **Sufi Message Volume VIIIa - Sufi Teachings, Judging, by Hazrat Inayat Khan.**
- (3) **Sufi Message Volume XIV - The Smiling Forehead, Part II - The Deeper Side of Life, Chapter XI, Justice and Forgiveness, Questions and Answers, by Hazrat Inayat Khan.**
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- (10) **Once Upon a Time, Early Days Stories About My Beloved Father and Mother, by Hidayat Inayat-Khan.**
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