

Zaya Benazzo:

How can we be present to the suffering of the world witness and make a stand for justice or against the injustice we see? And at the same time, trust that everything that is happening is part of a divine order.

Pir Zia Inayat Khan:

That's a wonderful question. I think that's the question we have to keep asking ourselves and working with is the key question.

And of course, every true question, every profound question carries in itself its own solution. If you live with that question, you're going to be guided, you're going to be shown the answer. You have to live with that conundrum. So one response to the question would be to point to a story, and it's the story of three sheiks, and three teachers.

And the teachers were asked a question. The question was, what do you do when you see someone do something wrong?

And the first sheik answered, "If I see someone do something wrong, I correct them. I call attention to the problem, and I show them that it needs to be fixed". That's the first answer. The second sheik gave a different answer. The second sheik said, "Correct. If I see something wrong, I look past it and look to what's beautiful and draw attention there and build on what's beautiful and don't focus on what's wrong".

And then the third Sheik answered, "Wrong, what wrong?"

So three very different answers, and yet each one has its It has meaning, it has its truth, in fact, in Sufism, these answers correspond to different stages on the path, and there's a fourth stage, too. So the first stage, everyone has to go through the stage, and still, even having gone through it, it remains valid even still.

And that is called the stage of *Sharia*, and that means "working to establish fairness in the world". It's the level of ethics and ensuring fair play and not taking more than is your due and ensuring reciprocity in all human dealings. So that's the stage in which the pursuit of justice insisting on justice and fighting for justice is absolutely necessary.

Then there's a second stage, which is called *Tariqa*, and *Tariqa* means that you, you're not simply concerned with an even score, but you're making an effort to go beyond reciprocity and to be generous, to be forgiving, to be more kind than legally you need to be. So the level of *Tariqa* has to do with focusing on beauty and cultivating beauty and trying to embody it and trying to build it in this world.

And that's another way. Then the third sheik answers from the perspective of *Haqiqat*. And *Haqiqat* means absolute truth, all encompassing oneness. And from that perspective, there is no duality. Everything is divine. Everything is an expression of the eternal. In time, and everything expresses and reveals the nature of the one life that is forever.

And if one is in that state, one is beyond judgment, one is beyond saying this is right and this is wrong. One is just witnessing God in this moment, in everything. And that's a true experience. The fourth stage is to weave them together because all three are needed. We do need to, we need to fight for justice and make sure that those who are disadvantaged are given the chance to receive what is their due.

We also need to be careful not to get stuck in a mode in which in fighting for justice, we fall into a polarity where we can't see the humanity anymore of the ones whose tyranny we're challenging. And all too often, a freedom fighter runs the risk of becoming a tyrant himself or herself. If one isn't careful, you see how, a resistance rises up to overturn a regime.

And then those who come into power just replicate the same dynamics of power all over again. So yes the cause of justice is important, but there are other aspects to be integrated. And the second aspect of *Tariqa* again has to do with working toward the beautiful, being guided by beauty. *Inallaha jameel wa yahubu Jamaal* is the Sufi saying – “God is beautiful and loves beauty”. And so in every effort that we undertake for the cause of justice, or for any cause, let it be beautiful, not only outwardly beautiful, aesthetically beautiful, but beautiful in manner, beautiful in intention, beautiful in that it's working toward and is waking up to that grace, that fineness that musicality, that we, that, that makes us swoon when we see it in someone or see it in a community or see it in nature, that it reminds us of why we're here in the first place.

It reminds us why this universe exists. It exists to reveal this beauty. And then we've got to have this ability also to say that ultimately there's a fuller beauty. Sufis speak of two different kinds of beauty. And one is called *Jamal*, and the other is called *Husn*.

And *Jamal* is that beauty that you could say it has an opposite. The opposite of *Jamal* is ugliness. And we want to avoid ugliness in our manner, in how we speak, in what we do. We want to avoid ugliness. So it's aspirational to avoid ugliness. Work toward a fineness, a thoughtfulness, a graciousness, a beauty that is evident. But that, even that kind of beauty still is part and parcel of a limited view of the world, a view in which there's always something better and something worse.

Whereas there's a higher beauty and that is the ultimate beauty, which is called *Husn*. And that has no opposite. And that's the beauty that you, where you see in the long *durée*, in the ultimate scheme of things, or even in the essence of this here and now, everything is included, everything is encompassed by and contained within that perfection that can never be marred, that can never be broken, that is already perfect and all-pervading.

So that is the beauty that rejects nothing, accepts everything, and goes to the essence.