

THE SCIENCE OF THE HEART

'The heart, which is called the mirror in Sufi terms, has two different actions which it performs. Whatever is reflected in the heart does not only remain a reflection but becomes a creative power, productive of a phenomenon of a similar nature ...'

Hazrat Inayat Khan, from 'The Mind World'

We are continuously subject to reflections, mostly subconsciously. Since our minds are increasingly bombarded with fleeting impressions, it serves us to reflect on the process of reflection itself, and on how we absorb or repel impressions. Personal expectations certainly play a part. Like, we don't buy everything on offer in a supermarket. We search for the items we already hold in mind. And our shopping history (recorded if we have a discount membership card) would show at a glance the consistency of our choices. Here we are limited by our resources, our tastes, and maybe by the consideration of a healthy diet. But what determines the expectations of our hopes, our relationships, and our aims in life? What of the discrepancy between what we think we want and what we consistently attract? What is impressed in us over time has stamped a pattern into our hearts, and that pattern gradually defines what we become. If we want to change that pattern, then we must look a little deeper.

There are examples to be found in the world of people who by retaining a thought have created on the physical plane its manifestation, its phenomenon. The reason is that the phenomenon is not only a picture as produced in the mirror, but that reflection in the heart is the most powerful thing. It is life itself and it is creative.

Hazrat Inayat Khan, from 'The Mind World'

Somewhere in the middle of that process of reflection there is a still point, where the probable seeks definition. Most of us have the occasional state of receptive alertness when this *creativity* in the heart can be glimpsed. At such moments we can witness the complexity of our thoughts, feelings and desires, and the mainly autonomous cognitive processes that form our personal meaning of reality. This witness can have a lucid appreciation of two worlds, the inner and the outer. But which way do we turn the mirror in this sheer marvel of our continuous self-creation?

INNER AND OUTER EXPERIENCE

H. I. Khan (in Metaphysics) describes the soul as having two different sides, one side experiencing through mind and body, the other through the spirit. The image he gives is of the soul being transparent, like glass, which becomes a mirror when one side is covered. The soul can be a mirror to the manifest world while covering the spirit world, and in this way gains outer knowledge. Or the soul mirrors the inner world, and receives inner knowledge. Some people are naturally inclined to turn to the spirit within and may develop exceptional psychic or clairvoyant abilities. H. I. Khan explains that the mystic does not desire this position but seeks a mastery of balance, in the sense that one can then choose which reflection is required at any given circumstance.

CHOICE

To make any *conscious* choice sparks contradiction. We would rather have something other bear the burden of this conflict. But our unconscious is never fooled. It seeks balance, and to that end will present us with an obstacle that urges a choice again, differently. We call it things going wrong. In the East they say Inshallah, Allah wills it. But where does the will of God operate if not in us? A mystic would state that from an enlightened position, beyond duality, we don't choose. In other words, united in consciousness with The One, freedom of choice has no meaning.

But body/minds are only ever partly enlightened. Parts operate in darkness, as parts of the universe lie in darkness, divided, unconscious. In fact, the Spirit that breathes and guides us, the Ideal we postulate, could not resist its numinous power, could not stand apart from its own existence and become conscious were it not for its dark parts.

The sun, being an early symbol of life-giving wholeness, continues to satisfy our need for meaning as symbol for the Self. If there was no object in the way of the sun/self, its light would be swallowed by darkness. If the source of light could not behold its own reflection, it could not become conscious of itself. In that way, we can think about everything that emits the spirit-light, every thing alive – and each of us. This whole wonderful phenomenon of life repeats the same architecture from our furthest perception of macrocosms down to our tiniest perception of microcosms. By the same token, we, as individuals, only become conscious of our selves if another presence reflects our being. Unconfirmed in our existence, the spirit in us remains unconscious.

In day-to-day living, we tend to be taken over by physical sensations and the trance of our psychological experiences, often remaining unaware of the witness in the mind, the depth of which is the heart. When this presence is in awareness, we see a timeless inner horizon open. The experience can inspire our imagination towards practising ways to remember, remember from moment to moment – remember that, irrespective of life's seeming duality, there is a wholeness pervading the universe. Our individual witnessing is wired to a larger witnessing, a creative power beyond the laws of time and space. So in essence, we are not the body/mind we occupy, but consciousness suffusing body/mind, which is witnessing from myriads of different perspectives, suspended between inner and outer reality. Our sun, in that sense, is only a reflection of an inner sun we partake of, a light revealed in us and through us, the light of the Spirit that infuses and orders all matter. But this beautiful world would dream the same dream forever, were it not for the human capacity of creative imagination.

THE IMAGINATIVE FUNCTION

The great Muhyi-d-Din Ibn 'Arabi (1165 to 1240) expressed the idea of creation through the creativity of the heart (Himma). He calls it the imaginative function by which things appear in the sensible world – the action that gives being to something from instant to instant. Like Hazrat Inayat Khan, like many other mystics, he reminds us that each of us gives life and being to what we reflect in the depth of our heart.

For those who are familiar with the paradigms of quantum physics, the parallel can delight. Scientific understanding changes frequently, but Bohr put it like this: *in the fuzzy and nebulous world of particles, the atom only sharpens into reality when we*

observe it. In the absence of observation, the atom could be called a ghost. It matters not, and yet, it matters how we perceive. We can look for the location of something in time, or we can look for its movement.

Relating this process to our perception of reality, we will know of people who don't like seeing things or situations too sharply, and others, who infuriate us by being too exacting with facts, even shutting down their capacity to imagine. Our relationship with reality can take extreme positions, often to avoid the conflict of life's crucifying contradictions. One extreme is to focus on a seemingly solid reality as functional and true, while rejecting the reality of change. Another extreme is to emphasise change as an excuse to strongly reject structures, especially when they are rigidly applied. Embracing life's contradiction means walking a tightrope and not blaming something other when we lose our balance. This skill requires appreciating structure, as well as using one's imagination, the kind of imagination that relates to the heart's creativity.

Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes the term 'imagination' from the usual sense of the word. He takes it neither as fantasy, nor as imaginings of the unreal, nor even as aesthetic creation. Instead, he correlates the term with a universe that is endowed with a perfectly 'objective' existence perceived through the imagination, an intermediate world of Idea-Images and archetypal figures that exists *between* the sensible and the spiritual world and is as real, objective and consistent as our physical world.

This creativity of the heart, the way of *Himma*, is described as the act of meditating, conceiving, imagining and projecting one's *ardent desire*. It is basically an act of *intention*, not in the wilful material sense, but intention that springs from a deep need to reach *beyond the known* for something that resonates in one's heart like the distant echo of a song. One could call it evolution itself.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, everything that exists in the sensible world is a reflection, a typification of what exists in the Spirit World. One and the same thing can exist simultaneously on entirely different planes (Hadarat). A thing may exist in the higher Hadarat but not in the lower and then again it may exist in all the Hadarat.

The mystic aims to *raise* sensory data to a higher level. This happens via the visionary imagination, the '*presence of the heart*', and it happens precisely in that intermediate world where material beings take form and where material beings dissolve again to become subtle bodies. This intermediate world exists not at the other end of the universe, but right here with us, between each of our breaths. This is how the presence of the heart affects, how ideals, in whatever way we conceive of our Ideal, become realised. What we give being to in this intermediate sphere inevitably appears and becomes endowed with an outward reality. This is so, even when it is visible only to the inner eye, the eye of the heart, just beyond what can be perceived by the senses.

Ibn 'Arabi points towards a spiritual understanding of revelation, in short the **ta'wil** (the 'carrying back' of a thing to its principle). It means being able to discern the hidden meaning (batin) of anything manifested. The ta'wil can therefore be understood as essential symbolic understanding. It is a process of transmutation of everything visible towards the intuitive essence of it, a seeing *through* towards the unique significance of something which partakes neither of universal logic nor sense perception and which is the only means of knowing something in essence. It is a

process of carrying sensible forms back into imaginative forms and then to further, still higher realms of meanings. To proceed in the opposite direction, to carry imaginative forms back to sensible forms in which they originate (like interpreting scriptures, myths and tales literally), is to destroy the virtualities of the imagination. Everything we see during our earthly life is of the same order (manzila) as vision in a dream. When we carry back the apparent form, *zahir*, to the real and hidden form, *batin*, then the hidden form will manifest as *truth*. That, in Sufism, is called *ta'wil*.

Form is a relic of eternal potential. Fazal Inayat Khan

Once a sensible thing takes on the value and meaning of a dream vision, it becomes subject to interpretation. The Question then is: 'what do we carry it back to? What is our *ta'wil* of it? What does it symbolize for one individually? This is what Ibn 'Arabi calls real knowledge, and nothing short of a renewal of creation. It is to typify, to transmute everything into an image-symbol by perceiving the correspondence between the hidden and the visible. Without such imaginative presence there would be no manifest existence, that is, no theophany (vision of God, The One), in other words, no creation, and by implication, no expansion of consciousness.

For Ibn 'Arabi, the creative power of the heart was experienced as the true reality, as an unlimited internal event, produced in each soul by the apparition that impresses it. To get to know one's own archetypal essence is to know one's Angel, that is to say, one's eternal individuality, or 'real name', as a direct revelation of one's soul's divinity revealing itself to itself. Here is a sweet intimacy, different from the 'one God for all' idea, which has been seen to have the distortional consequence of inflating the believer with a kind of spiritual imperialism. Attuning with the inner, invisible guide (Khidr), leads a person towards his or her own theophany and inner heaven.

THE IMPULSE TOWARDS AUTHENTICITY

'The experience you have within yourself, of your separate identity, to allow right and wrong to be redefined by you, your singular contribution, is where evolution really happens. You, by becoming yourself, can open a new wavelength.'

Fazal Inayat Khan

Moments of resonating with what *appears* in mirrors outside and inside us, clearly happen through a deeper faculty in us, the faculty of a subtle or virtual heart. In a culture where fear and greed dominate, perceptions of reality are distorted. In such a culture solutions can only be found by an inner guidance, by practicing intuition, by listening to the subtle heart that nudges us towards deeper knowing. We are never far from its virtual essence. The rhythms of our inner and outer experiences can come into alignment suddenly, and this can be like coming upon a clearing in a dense wood, or upon the waters of a calm pond, it can happen in the supermarket, and when it happens, all is well. It is like coming home.

Significantly, the ill ease of our material societies impels many towards personal development. Our long projected shadow makes an *appearance* in the psychic organism of individuals, forcing the rational, control-hungry consciousness, which has inflated the western ego, to find a balance with the unconscious, with the numinous in nature. Carl Gustav Jung advised, *we must allow our psyche to guide us*. Based on his

own journey, Jung also introduced an archetypal psychology for personalities who are sufficiently balanced to start with, individuation, a concept based on the emerging archetype he called the Self, a wholeness that seeks realisation in us. There is a resonance with what Ibn 'Arabi calls the *ardent desire* to know one's archetypal essence. And it relates to what Fazal I. Khan calls our singular contribution. Not outside, but deeply hidden in us, not found if not imagined, lies our purpose, our signal, ready to be acknowledged and expressed by us. Artists who follow their inner calling have shared the realisation that the deeper you go into your own reality, the more universal your experience becomes. This is where the acceptance of one's unique being, one's individual pitch, comes into resonance with a larger totality of the psyche, carried by the base note of a collective orchestration.

We have a tendency to escape from conflict and complexity into the bliss of a collective slumber. Waking is not for everyone. But a subtle alchemy of integration works away as we dream our realities. The soul is sensitive, easily frightened. As we learn to be with pain, with solitude, and with uncertainty, our ego-constructs soften, and we become more of a dance than some material truth-construct we must defend.

In the present phase of our runaway progress, we must ask new questions and learn to know more about ourselves. We must develop human qualities. We must create environments for children to grow into authentic, well rounded personalities. And for our children to have a future at all, we must put our depleted planet to rights. I find it deeply meaningful that the increasing cultural migration of people round the world calls on us to tolerate and rise above differences. We are challenged to make space for each other to exist and allow our unique becoming. Many treasures will emerge when we encourage each others' individual styles towards wholeness. There lies a promise – towards unity in consciousness, not based on rational materialism, or blind faith, but achieved by the science of the heart.

If the heart is clear enough to receive reflections fully and clearly, one can choose for oneself which to retain and which to repel.'

Hazrat Inayat Khan, from 'The Mind World'

@ Ashen Venema, August 2002

References:

Hazrat Inayat Khan's quotes are taken from *The Mind World*, first published by Luzac & Co., London 1935. The text can now be found online as volume 4, *Healing and the Mind World*:

www.sufimessage.com

H. I. Khan's thoughts on Metaphysics can found at the same website in Volume 5, *Spiritual Liberty*.

The short introduction on the Imaginative Function in this article is freely based on texts found in 'Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi'. Translated by Henry Corbin, Bollingen Series XC1, Princeton University Press 1969

Fazal Inayat (1942 -1990), Mystic, Poet and Psychotherapist, was the grandson of Hazrat Inayat Khan. His quotes are taken from lectures the writer attended.