

The Heart

These quotations have been selected from the works of Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, the founder of the Sufi Order International.



Spirituality is the tuning of the heart; one can obtain it neither by study, nor by piety.

If there is anything that can tune a man to a higher pitch or to a lower pitch, that can loosen the strings of his soul or tune them to the right note - it can only be done by the tuning of the heart. The one who has not reached his heart cannot reach God, and the one who has not reached the heart of his fellow men has not reached him. People may become friends, they may become acquaintances, relations, they may become connected through industry, political friendship, partnership in business or any collaboration, and yet they may be separated. Nearness in space does not bring the nearness of real friendship. There is only one way of coming near to one another and that is by way of the heart.

When I open my eyes to the outer world I feel myself as a drop in the sea; but when I close my eyes and look within, I see the whole universe as a bubble raised in the ocean of my heart.

I searched, but could not find Thee; I called Thee aloud, standing on the minaret; I rang the temple bell with the rising and setting of the sun; I bathed in the Ganges in vain; I came back from Ka'ba disappointed; I looked for Thee on earth; I searched for Thee in the heaven; my Beloved, but at last I have found Thee hidden as a pearl in the shell of my heart.

From the mystical point of view it is symbolical that the personality is formed around the heart. For a materialist the heart is a piece of flesh hidden in the breast; for the mystic the heart is the centre around which the personality is formed.

We see that our life is full of impressions which we receive consciously or unconsciously, and from these we derive either benefit or disadvantage. We learn from this that if we had the power to receive or to reject reflections, we should become the masters of life. And now the question is how to learn this; how can we manage to receive impressions which are beneficial, and also to reject those that we do not wish to receive? The first and most essential thing is to make the heart a living heart, by purifying it from all undesirable impressions; by clearing it of fixed thoughts and beliefs, and then by giving it a life; and that life is within itself, and is love. When the heart is so prepared, then by means of concentration one must learn how to focus it; for it is not every one who knows how to focus his heart to receive a certain reflection. A poet, a musician, a writer, a thinker, unconsciously focuses his mind on the work of someone who has lived before him; and by focussing his mind on the work of a great personality he comes in contact with that personality, and he derives benefit from it, very often without knowing the secret. A young musician may be thinking of Bach or Beethoven or Wagner. By focussing his mind on that particular work he derives, without knowing it, a reflection of the spirit of Wagner or Beethoven, which is a great help to his work; and he expresses in his work the reflection which he receives.

To say, "God is in me" before one has realized this other, metaphysical aspect of truth, is not humble but profane. God is in the depth of the heart, but to know this is of no use when the doors of the heart are not open. It is the realization of the innumerable faults which makes one humble and effaces the little self from one's consciousness. And it is in the effacement of the self that real spiritual attainment lies.

The heart is a window between mind and soul, for the soul to send its light to the mind, and for the knowledge of the mind to be reflected on the soul. Therefore, when the heart is closed the communication between soul and mind is closed also.

The question arises: what is the manner of opening the heart? The way to it is a natural life, the life of the child, smiling with the smiling one, praying with the praying one, ready to learn from everyone, ready to love. The child has enmity against no one, he has no hatred, no malice, his heart is open. It is in the child that you can see the smiles of angels; he can see through life.

A person with heart quality need not be simple, he need not discard intellect; only, the heart quality produces that perfume in the intellect which is as fragrance in a flower. Morals learned from logic are dry morals, a fruit without juice, a flower without fragrance. It is the heart quality that as a course of nature produces virtues which no one can teach; a loving person, a person with sympathy in his heart, teaches morals through himself. It is the balance of mind and heart, or the balance of thought and feeling that makes the ground ready for sowing the seed of the inner life.

As one can see when the eyes are open, so one can understand when the heart is open.

Instead of teaching the lesson of indifference, as many mystics have done, the Sufis have learned the lesson of love, of devotion, of sympathy, and have called it the cultivation of the heart. It is known by the word suluk, which means the loving manner. What we call refined manner is only a manner behind which there is no life. When manner is directed by the heart quality then it becomes living manner, the manner that comes from love, and all such attributes as kindness, gentleness, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy and compassion — they all spring from this loving manner.

Ecstasy is a feeling that comes only when the heart is tuned to that pitch of love which melts it, which makes it tender, which gives it gentleness, which makes it humble.

For higher attainment on the spiritual path study is secondary; all knowledge of occult and psychic law, all magical powers, are secondary. The first and most important principle is the cultivation of the heart quality.

One may ask: How to cultivate the heart quality? There is only one way: to become selfless at each step one takes forward on this path, for what prevents one from cultivating the loving quality is the thought of self. The more we think of our self the less we think of others, and as we go further the self grows to become worse and worse. In the end the self meets us as a giant which we had always fought; and now at the end of the journey the giant is the stronger. But if from the first step we take on the path of perfection we struggled and fought and conquered this giant which is the self, it could be done only by the increasing power of love.

What is necessary is to develop a sympathetic nature and to sustain its gradual growth. As it is difficult for the student of voice-culture to practice his voice and not to let it be spoiled—for even practice may spoil it—so it is with the sympathetic person: while developing the faculty of sympathy there is a chance of spoiling it. In other words, the more loving a person, the more chance he has to be disappointed. The greater the love, the finer the fragility and the more susceptible to everything; therefore the greater the love, the more fragile the heart—at any moment it can break. The one who walks in the path of sympathy therefore must take great care that his way may not be blocked. It is his own perseverance that will keep him from everything that is trying to block his way.

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There is one principle to be remembered in the path of sympathy: we must do all we can with regard to the pleasure of those whom we love and whom we meet, but we must not expect the best from those whom we love and meet, for we must know that the world is as it is. We cannot change it, but we can change ourselves. The one who wants others to do what he wishes them to do will always be disappointed.

Apart from all other things, when we come to spiritual attainment, it is something we can never absorb through the head, it is something that can only be received from the heart. Let two persons, one with the heart and the other with head listen to the teachings of a teacher. One will be thinking, “is it so, or is it not so, or how is it, if it is so? How can it be. And if it is, why is it?” And there is never an end to the ‘why.’

And another person will listen with his heart; and both things logic and reason are at his disposal, but at the same time they are not troubling him. His heart is open, he listens to it; and the quality of the heart is such that whatever falls upon it, upon an open heart becomes revealed instantly. Remember, when one says, “I cannot understand you”, it is just like saying, “I have my heart closed to you.” There is no other reason for not understanding, that is the only reason. And when one says, “I have understood it all”, that means the heart was open; that is why the person has understood.

Therefore understanding does not depend upon the head; it depends upon the heart. By the help of the head one can make it more clear, it becomes intelligible, one can express it better. But it must begin, it must come, from the heart, not from the head. Besides, a person with head says, “yes, it must be so because I think so.” The person with heart says, “it is so because I believe so.” That is the difference. In one person there is a doubt, in the other there is a conviction.

If heart quality is very strong and intellect lacking, then also life lacks balance. Knowledge and heart quality must be developed in balance.

Man’s heart is like a piece of ground; you may sow anything in it and rear it. When the fruit comes, the man knows whether it was a sweet fruit or poison.

To become cold with the coldness of the world is weakness, and to become broken by the hardness of the world is feebleness, but to live in the world and yet to keep above

the world is like walking on the water. There are two essential duties for the man of wisdom and love; that is to keep the love in our nature ever increasing and expanding and to strengthen the will so that the heart may not be easily broken. Balance is ideal in life; man must be fine and yet strong, man must be loving and yet powerful.

The wise person should keep the balance between love and power; he should keep the love in his nature ever increasing and expanding, and at the same time strengthen the will so that the heart may not easily be broken.

As one can see when the eyes are open, so one can understand when the heart is open.

The only way to live in the midst of inharmonious influences is to strengthen the will power and endure all things, yet keeping fineness of character and nobility of manner, together with an everlasting heart full of love.

If there is any coming religion, a new religion to come, it will be this religion, the religion of the heart. Persons who had deep experiences of any kind, of suffering, of agonies, of love, of hate, of solitude, of association, of success, of failure, they all have a particular quality, a quality which has a particular use for others. And when one knows this, one will come to this conclusion that, “whatever has been my life’s destiny, my heart has prepared a chemical substance through sorrow or pain, through joy or through pleasure, a chemical substance that is for some certain purpose for humanity and that, I can only give that substance for the use of humanity if I can keep my heart watered and open.” Once it is closed, once it is frozen, once it has turned from hot to stone, the person is no longer living. It does not matter what the person has gone through, for even the worst poison can be of some use. There is no person therefore, however wicked, who is of no use, if only he knew that the condition of being useful to humanity is only one, and that is to keep the heart open.

After all the suffering that has been caused to humanity by the recent war, man is beginning to open his eyes. And as time will pass he will open his eyes to know and understand that the true religion is in opening the heart, in widening the outlook, and in living the religion which is one religion.