



THE TRIALS AND REFUGE OF THE INNER LIFE

Sermon by Siraja Stephanie Nuria Sabato

Beloved Ones of God,

The *inner life* calls us to wakeful responsibility for the choices we make and for our own actions – and one could even say reactions. These choices, actions, and reactions ultimately cause a "re-echo" returning to us again and again in some form. Our obscured view of appearances may be to think that someone has hurt us, someone has misunderstood us, but do we take the time to think that all may be the consequences of our very own thoughts, words, and deeds?

What is more, perhaps we have an unwillingness to act responsibly because we do not want to take the time or energy to reflect and do so. If we fall into this manner of being, we run the risk that each day will flow into the other as a kind of malaise or confusion, filled with uncertainty, delays, and one procrastination after another. In the end we are left with a pile of unfinished business and unresolved burdensome issues.

As Hazrat Inayat Khan teaches us: *"It is not sufficient to think only of the present moment; one should also think where it comes from and where it goes. Every thought that comes to our mind, every impulse, every word we speak, is like a seed, a seed, which falls in this soil of life, and takes root. And in this way we find that nothing is lost; every good deed, every little act of kindness, of love, done to anybody, will some day rise as a plant and bear fruit"* – [and the opposite is also true]." (Sufi Message Volume 6, Alchemy of Happiness, The Struggle of Life 1, Struggle with Conditions)

When we look at things from this perspective we can see that our own destiny and fate is in our very own hands. So don't become too overly dramatic about arising occurrences. From one view all is passing, all is fleeting, all is flowing, all is impermanent and momentary. Yet we may be planting the seeds of our future. For this reason there is work to be done now! And that work is both sown in the inner life and reaped both in the inner life and outer life. As Harzrat Inayat Khan teaches, "*The Sufi does not consider life as different from business, but he sees how real business can be achieved in the best manner.*" (Sufi Message Volume 6, Alchemy of Happiness, The Struggle of Life 1, Struggle with Conditions)

We need not beat ourselves up about every little thing. This too is a form of procrastination and a side of the ego that strives for justification for its own limitations. We are the embodiment of good qualities and yes, some shadow aspect of qualities as well.

The challenging qualities of an unchecked attachment to ego identification, which we can craftily obscure from the view of others or worse yet – from our own private view, leads to big problems which will ultimately obscure our own truth, diminish our own life force, and weaken our own inner strength.

Let us pull ourselves out of the proverbial mud, gutter, or whatever that low-lying place we find ourselves from time to time. To do otherwise is to further perpetuate the cycle of wavering between self-pity, self-loathing, or the other extreme, which is the trap of falling into complete forgetfulness and unconsciousness of life's purpose.

Welcome all into the Presence of the Divine Light and Life. "*To Thine Own Self Be True.*" Allow all to arise naturally to the surface and work to refine what needs

to be refined. Don't make excuses. All of this is the Path! All of it! We are on the Path of Initiation – the Inner Life. Take all steps and arising challenges along the way as a method towards your own wholesomeness, your own illumination, your own inner unity, your own inner serenity, and your own ultimate enlightenment. This is where practice and life become one seamlessly interconnected flow.

Be alert and mature in this undertaking of self-examination by turning again and again towards the *inner life*. This inward turning will be an aid in transforming shadowed qualities into ornamented jewels of one's own personality and which will crown your ennobled soul. This transformation is bought with the currency of the struggle of wakeful diligence in search of Truth – Your Truth. *“To Thine Own Self Be True!”*

Hazrat Inayat Khan offers us this wise advice in the text titled the Alchemy of Happiness, Struggle with Conditions. *“How does the Sufi struggle? He struggles with power, with understanding, with open eyes, and with patience. He does not look at the loss; what is lost is lost. He does not think of the pain of yesterday; yesterday is gone for him. Only if a memory is pleasant does he keep it before him, for it is helpful on his way. He takes both the admiration and the hatred coming from around him with smiles; he believes that both these things form a rhythm; within the rhythm of a certain music there is one and [there is] two, the strong accent and the weak accent. Praise cannot be without blame, nor can blame be without praise. [The wise] keeps the torch of wisdom before [oneself and] believes that the present is the echo of the past, and that the future will be the reflection of the present.”* (Sufi Message Volume 6, Alchemy of Happiness, The Struggle of Life 1, Struggle with Conditions)

This teaching of Hazrat Inayat Khan is beautifully illustrated by the life and inner spiritual path of the 11th century Tibetan saint, Milerapa. Milerapa rose above the

miseries of his younger life and with the help of his Guru, Marpa The Translator, achieved an enlightened state, but not without blame and certainly not without effort. Here is a brief version of his life story.

Milerapa was born into a privileged family. As Milerapa's Father was dying he called upon Milerapa's aunt and uncle to manage his estate until Milerapa reached the age of maturity. But what happened is that the aunt and uncle were both heartless and greedy, and they took over the estate, claiming it as their own, and putting Milerapa, his mother, and his sister out on the street as beggars.

[If we are not careful attachments and our outer life will rob us of the riches of our inner life.]

When Milerapa reached the age of 15 his mother decided to save enough money to send Milerapa to study with a sorcerer. In this way Milerapa would become the agent of her revenge through the use of black magic.

[If we are not mindful we can become the agents of our egos for self-seeking justification.]

The mother's revenge was twice delivered upon the ruthless aunt and uncle and those of the village, who helped in the perpetuation of the unlawful overtaking of Milerapa's family estate.

The first incident was when all the relatives and friends, who had been most offensive to Milerapa's family, had gathered to celebrate a wedding at the great stone house, which originally belonged to Milerapa's family. There was a big commotion outside and the horses in the yard started kicking and running about violently, until one of them ran into the main supporting column of the three story

house with such a force that the entire house came crashing down on the wedding party killing everyone inside except for the Aunt and Uncle.

[The aunt and uncle here represent the instinct of our ego to survive.]

Milarepa's mother, when hearing of the catastrophe became gloating ecstatically with cruel joy. This, of course, made the relatives of the dead very angry, and they decided to take action, but they were divided on whether to kill Milerapa's mother or to go after Milarepa for their revenge.

Milarepa's mother sent a message for his help, and so he traveled incognito back to his homeland and set up a ritualistic site on a hillside overlooking the village. He began his incantations and soon dark clouds began to gather and then a succession of three powerful hailstorms utterly ruined the entire barley crop of that year.

Over time something awakened in Milerapa and he began to feel inwardly repentant for all the evil deeds. He longed for religion and wanted to be delivered from committing further evil acts. He worried greatly over the heavy debts of karma he had incurred through his evil actions and could think of nothing else. His black magic teacher knew that he himself could not offer Milerapa the proper instruction towards his inner life, and thus sent him to in search for the great lama, Marpa The Translator.

[All this may be likened to our own calling to an inner life.]

After Milerapa's, initial meeting with Marpa, there began a period during which Marpa withheld spiritual instruction, and kept Milarepa busy at strenuous physical labors building various stone temples. By nature the teacher, Marpa, was

outwardly a rough and tyrannical teacher but inwardly he was all love and compassion.

Marpa had Milarepa build a stone structure on a high rocky ridge only to have him tear it down, and take all the rocks and boulders back to where they were found, telling him he had changed his plans and now wanted a new structure built in another place. This was repeated on three different ridges until finally he had Milarepa build a grand multi-storied temple on yet a fourth ridge.

[The three initial temples represent the purification of Milarepa's non-virtuous acts of the past, present, and future. The fourth temple represents merit for the building a storehouse of future merit for the of Milarepa's future and for the benefit of all beings.]

During the years when Milarepa was laboring, Marpa continued giving instructions to his other students. On several different occasions, various individuals among the disciples underwent initiations to receive the sacred instructions and Milarepa would try to join them but the Lama would drive him away with angry shouts and fierce beatings, causing him great mental distress.

Over time Milarepa was plunged into deep despair thinking that Marpa's actions were due only to all the evil he had previously done. Sometimes Milarepa considered taking drastic action, bringing him to the verge of either taking his own life or running away. Eventually Milarepa went off by himself and thinking things over he concluded that Marpa would never confer on him the spiritual truths he sought and that he should seek the teachings elsewhere.

Milerapa traveled to another Lama who conferred on him initiations and instructions for meditation with no results. In the end, through a series of circumstances Milerapa returned to the home of Marpa The Translator.

This story, is a true story and it is also allegorical in demonstrating the seeming struggle of polarities in life, which can be viewed as either a curse carrying us spiraling downward, or a blessing illuminating our inner life with the luminous qualities of patience, persistence, courage, and trust.

In the end Marpa gave initiation to Milerapa and sent time him to a cave for a long retreat. This is what Milerapa realized through his perseverance in the journey towards his inner life:

“I have understood this body of mine to be the product of ignorance, composed of flesh and blood and lit up by the perceptive power of consciousness. To those fortunate ones who long for emancipation it may be the great vessel by which they may procure Freedom. This life is the boundary mark whence one may take an upward or downward path. Our present time is a most precious time, wherein each of us must decide, in one way or other, for lasting good or lasting ill.

One who aims only at his own individual peace and happiness adopts the lower path, but the one who devotes the merits of love and compassion to the cause of others belongs to the higher path.

In meditating on the Final Goal, one has to discover the non-existence of the personal Ego, and therefore the fallacy that it exists, because everything in the universe with name and form is basically illusory in nature.

All the efforts put forth during this path must be made in a spirit of compassion with the aim of dedicating the merit of one's efforts to the Universal Good. There is a need of mentally praying and wishing for blessings on others so earnestly that one's mind also transcends thought.

Just as the mere name of food does not satisfy the appetite of a hungry person, so also a person who would learn about Universal Awareness must also meditate so as to realize it, not just learn of its definition.”

In the end, one could say, "Be kind and gentle, considerate and truthful with oneself and others."

All this is offered from my heart to your heart with the utmost respect to the light and realization of your being towards your life's purpose. If there is any merit in our time here together, “*May it benefit all sentient beings*”.