

The Inayatiyya Order

An Interfaith Approach to Spiritual Growth



The Invocation

Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty, the Only Being, united with all the illuminated souls who form the embodiment of the master, the spirit of guidance.

The Inayatiyya Order is an esoteric school which provides a setting in which real spiritual experience is possible. We encourage awakening in life, and work towards a balanced and grounded spirituality. We also encourage an attitude of affirmation of the common ideals of all religious faiths. We do not require an acceptance of any specific religious beliefs, nor do we seek to convert anyone from one faith to another. We feel that real development can only take place if people work with what is meaningful for them, and that a deepening of one's spiritual experience is essential to informed belief. We try to create a safe environment where people will feel free to be spiritually open. Because of this need, we discourage discussions or debates on religious opinions or theology. Instead we attempt to focus any discussion on the experiences which result from spiritual practice.

Our hope for our students is that they will find deeper meaning in their own religious beliefs through the experiences gained in our school, and that they will develop an enhanced tolerance towards religious beliefs other than their own.

Background

The Inayatiyya Order was founded by Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882—1927). Inayat Khan's son and successor, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, led the order until he passed away in 2004. The Order is currently led by Pir Vilayat's successor, Pir Zia Inayat Khan.

The Order evolved from the universal spiritual tradition of the Chisti lineage, which originated in the East. Hazrat Inayat Khan, who had been given the task by his Sufi teacher to "*unite East with West in the harmony of your music*," communicated the fundamental metaphysics and practices of the ancient Sufis to the people of the West. He founded the Sufi Order and incorporated it in London, England. It later became the Sufi Order International. It is now called the Inayatiyya.

As the first Sufi teacher in the West, Inayat Khan sought to make the spiritual legacy of Sufism responsive to the needs of our time. He was one of the first to speak of an emerging planetary consciousness as the next stage in the spiritual evolution of humanity.

In the later years of his life he spoke of Sufism as the mother who would give birth to a child whom he called the Message, that is beyond any names or labels. He believed the Message would facilitate the awakening of the consciousness of humanity to the divinity within, and dwell upon the quintessence of all the religions: living spiritual experience and attunement rather than adhesion to past formulas. It would bring a new life to all facets of human endeavour.

Spiritual guidance is freely offered to those who have chosen to enter into individual training, through the process of initiation.

Initiation

The purpose of initiation is the unfoldment of the individual. The esoteric school provides training in a course of spiritual studies with a dynamic process of transmission of teaching through the relationship with one's guide. The aim is to discover a means of expressing divinity in one's life and through one's being, honouring individual goals and sense of calling. The spiritual journey takes place in the context of a community of seekers in both centres and in the greater society.

Of primary concern is sincerity of intention. There must also be the attitude of an open heart and mind toward the teachings, although complete acceptance is never required and there is no dogma. While the prospective initiate may not understand the full ramification of this act, there must be an awareness of the significance of such a step. Initiation signifies a serious commitment to deeply participate in a process of spiritual training. It is especially important that one not be unrealistic in his/her expectations, desire "*fantastic experiences*" or occult powers, attempt to use spiritual practices as a means of escape from the world, or evade personal issues through the misuse of spirituality. A person interested in initiation is usually asked to attend some classes and seminars on the teachings. During this period he/she may be viewed as a candidate for initiation.

Initiation is the beginning of a journey. If one wishes to attain one's goal, work must be done and support is needed. Support is available in the form of peer support, personal guidance, classes, reading, individual and group retreats, seminars, etc. At the same time, each of us must do our own work, since we, alone, are responsible for living our lives.

Spiritual Guidance and Training

The process of spiritual growth involves exploring the evolving relationship of the individual with him/herself, with the guide, and with the broader society.

Spiritual guides are appointed by the Pir of the Order. Most guides are local Centre Representatives, individuals who have undergone a number of years of rigorous training. The Order emphasizes the development of the individual; therefore, these Representatives vary greatly in teaching style, personality, etc. Since a student's initiator normally becomes their guide, those interested in initiation are encouraged to select a Representative with whom they feel a deep trust and respect, for these qualities are necessary to facilitate the training offered. The initiate receives, from her/his initiator or guide, spiritual practices which are designed to promote spiritual realization, facilitate the unfoldment of their being and assist them in meeting life's challenges and demands. These practices are not compulsory but are given as a gift.

The structure and frequency of classes in local centres varies greatly. The material covered should be the teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan, Pir Vilayat, Pir Zia and the ancient Sufis. Some Representatives follow the curriculum established by Hazrat Inayat Khan or the newer curriculum created by Pir Vilayat while others take a more intuitive approach.

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What is Sufism?

Here are a few quotations from Hazrat Inayat Khan regarding Sufism.

The Sufi Message is not a Message of a particular creed, it is the Message of understanding life better. And the question how can one attain to it, is to be answered that it is not one day's work, or two days' work. It is the work of a whole life.

Sufism is only a light thrown upon your own religion, like a light brought into a room containing all the things you want; the one thing needed was light.

To the question, "Are you a Christian?", "Are you a Muslim?", "Are you a Jew?", the Sufi's answer would be 'yes' rather than 'no', for the Sufi opposes no religion but sympathizes with all. In fact Sufism cannot be called a religion, for it does not impose either belief or principle upon anyone, considering that each individual soul has its own principles best suited for it, and a belief which changes with each grade of evolution.

The germ of Sufism is said to have existed from the beginning of the human creation, for wisdom is the heritage of all; therefore no one person can be said to be its propounder. It has been revealed more clearly and spread more widely from time to time as the world has evolved.

The work of the Sufi message is to spread the unity of religion. It is not a mission to promote a particular creed or any Church or religion; it is a work to unite the followers of different religions and faiths in wisdom, so that without having to give up their own religion they may strengthen their own faith and focus the true light upon it. In this way a greater trust, a greater confidence will be established in mankind.

The Sufi Message...does not bring theories or doctrines to add to those already existing, which puzzle the human mind. What the world needs

today is the message of love, harmony, and beauty, the absence of which is the only tragedy of life. The Sufi Message does not give a new law. It awakens in humanity the spirit of brotherhood, with tolerance on the part of each for the religion of the other, and with forgiveness from each for the fault of the other. It teaches thoughtfulness and consideration, so as to create and maintain harmony in life; it teaches service and usefulness, which alone can make life in the world fruitful and in which lies the satisfaction of every soul.

What is Sufism? It is wisdom. To learn wisdom at every step on the path of life is the only work of the Sufi.

In a few words Sufism means to know one's true being, to know the purpose of one's life and to know how to accomplish that purpose.

The principal teaching of Sufism is that of learning to become a pupil, for it is the pupil who has a chance of becoming a teacher, and once a person considers that he is a teacher, his responsiveness is gone. The greatest teachers of the world have been the greatest pupils. It is this principle which is represented by the crescent: the crescent in the heart signifies that the heart which is responsive to the light of God is illuminated.

The idea of Sufism is to bring humanity, nations, and religions, now so far apart, into harmony and unity by awakening the thought of unity in souls. It is a message not to one community or race only, but to the whole humanity; not a call to join any particular church or religion, but a call to join in the human brotherhood.

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