

## Addendum III: Saum and Salat

As research from the Nekbakht Foundation has shown, Indian songs are the inspiration for Inayat Khan's prayers Saum and Salat. As far as we know, Inayat learned these songs through a translation from his French mureed Marquis François de Breteuil.<sup>1</sup>

The correspondence between the translations and the prayers is undeniable. A comparison also shows that the Indian songs may have triggered Inayat Khan's inspiration, but that inspiration itself – Inayat Khan's 'Spirit of Guidance' – finished the job and led to an intriguing mix of Hindu and Sufi background, typical for the Indian Sufism of Inayat Khan.

A fuller analysis of Saum, Salat, and several other of Inayat Khan's other major prayers, can be found in our *Draw us Closer*. Here, we want to highlight some of the characteristic Hindu and Sufi elements of both prayers.

Inayat Khan's Islamic Sufi background is not always easy to decipher, as he offered his teachings in a form, adapted to his western audience, and avoided technical terms in Arabic, Persian, or Urdu. Yet in his early London years, he announced a biography on the Prophet Muhammad (*Life of Mohammed from a Sufi point of view*), as yet unpublished, and *Sufi Interpretation of Quran*, of which unfortunately no manuscript is known to exist.<sup>2</sup>

For a full assessment of Inayat Khan's background, a larger scale and more formal research is needed, but already with some understanding of the Quran and classical Sufism, much of Inayat Khan's teachings can be traced back to the old Sufi masters and also show his innovative approach which led him away from a dogmatic approach and towards his universal Sufism, open for all creeds and denominations. Especially the prayer Saum shows the influence of Sura al-Fatiha, the opening prayer of the Quran and the most often prayed prayer in the Islamic world. Inayat Khan and his Companions (his two brothers Maheboob and Musharaff and his cousin Ali) would always start their meditations with the threefold recitation of Sura al-Ikhlās (Sura 112), followed by Sura al-Fatiha.<sup>3</sup>

In keeping with the general tradition in the Middle East and with Islam in particular, Inayat Khan offers movements to both Saum and Salat. These all can be traced back to the obligatory Islamic *salat*, the five-times-a-day prayer, indicating the influence of the *salat* Inayat Khan was raised with in India.

Together with *Khatum*, *Saum* and *Salat* feature in the Universal Worship, an interfaith ritual honoring the different traditions. This ritual was inspired by Inayat Khan and some of his followers to serve the needs of those mureeds who were drawn to this kind of church-like ritual. Here is what he says about these prayers:

The prayers used in the Universal Worship: Saum, Salat, and Khatum, have an inner significance besides their outer meaning. These prayers are not only praise to God or thanksgiving, but they are to draw us nearer, closer to the Divine Being; this is the mission of the Sufi Message today. Therefore, it

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1 Complete Works, Sayings, Part I: p. 199.

2 *Sufi*, a quarterly magazine. Nekbakht Foundation, 2020, p. 151.

3 Dr. Karin Jironet: *Sufi Mysticism into the West*. Peeters2009, p. 17 – 18.

is most essential to keep the words of these prayers exact, that you may give it to future generations in an authentic form, uncorrupted. In this you will be doing great service to God and to humanity.

There should be no attempt made to add something to them or to take something from them in order to create beauty. For if every person makes a choice in that prayer, at the end of the year it will be quite a different prayer. These prayers are too sacred to touch, for they are not coming from a human brain; they are poured out by the tongue of God; and it is in this understanding that one will benefit fully by the prayers of the Universal Worship.

These prayers increase inspiration and power as many times one repeats them. The more one repeats them, so the more one is blessed, so the greater becomes one's psychic power, and they awaken inspiration. If there is any deep desire that one has, by the repetition of these prayers that desire will be fulfilled. But the greatest blessing is that they help one to come closer and closer to God, Who is the seeking of every soul.<sup>4</sup>

### **Confraternity**

At this last Summer School of 1926, Inayat Khan introduced *the Confraternity of the Message*, a ritual of prayer where the main prayers of Inayat Khan find a place.

This ritual is often done when followers of the western Sufi path meet, but the Confraternity can also be done on an individual base.

Through initiation, students commit themselves to perform this ritual every day. The Confraternity can be seen as a westernized form of the Islamic salat that the Indian master had abandoned in adapting his Message to the West, albeit – in accordance with Inayat Khan's undogmatic approach to religion – a voluntarily commitment rather than a prescribed religious duty.

The format of this ritual is as follows:

#### *Morning:*

Saum / May the Message of God reach far and wide (11 x) / Pir / Prayer for the Universel.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Afternoon:*

Salat / Pour upon us Thy Love and Thy Light (11 x) / Nabi / Prayer for the Universel.

#### *Evening:*

Khatum / Disclose to us Thy Divine Light (11 x) / Rasul / Prayer for the Universel.

Below we offer the sources that triggered Inayat Khan's inspiration.

A comparison with the final versions of the two prayers, both published in *Gayan*, 1923, offers possible sources that inspired Inayat Khan to these two prayers.

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<sup>4</sup> *Addresses to Cherags*, Address 15: Prayers, p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> See our website (Papers) for more on the Prayer for the Universel and Inayat Khan's vision.

## Saum

Inayat Khan called *Saum* the prayer for the morning, as he dedicated it to the Trimurti principle of beginning (symbolized in Brahma). *Saum* is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, asking followers to fast during the month of Ramadan. *Saum* literally means abstaining, to give up, to leave.

Besides abstaining from food and drink, the Sufis also practiced the fasting of money and words, as mentioned in the Quran (2: 188), which reads as an antidote to the profit-driven economy model of our society.

Giving fasting an inner meaning, one can see fasting as only relying on the most necessary by putting all your trust in God, as expressed in the fourth line of Sura al-Fatiha ('Only to you we pray and only you we ask for help'). This is the ideal of the Sufi *dervish*, the Buddhist *bhikkhu*, and the Indian *sadhu*.

The inspiration for Saum is the following song, possibly translated from Sanskrit:

*Be Thou praised, o merciful, great and supreme God  
o take us in Thy arms – and raise from the dense earth.  
o use us for purpose that Thy wisdom chooseth  
and draw us near Thee to our life every moment.*<sup>6</sup>

Here are the lines of the final version of Saum, each with a short description to indicate possible sources that may have fed Inayat Khan's inspiration.

As the original song of only four lines shows, most of *Saum* is inspired and can be seen as original words of Inayat Khan.

 *Praise be to Thee, Most Supreme God, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, All-pervading, the Only Being.*

In most traditions, prayers start with praise, invoking the qualities of the Divine, and this prayer is no exception.

The capitalized words refer to wazifas, the Most Beautiful Names or Qualities of the One. They underline the unique Oneness of the Only Being (Ibn 'Arabi's *waḥdat al-wajud*).<sup>7</sup>

 *Take us in Thy Parental Arms, raise us from the denseness of the earth.*

A plea for help from the Divine and at the same time the recognition that *God loves us more than a mother loves her offspring* (Hadith) and that we as Khalifs of the Divine on earth, are created in his image, so are like God's children.

The denseness of the earth relates to the Indian concepts of the three *gunas* (qualities) with *tamas* as the denseness of matter which can be raised to the etheric and pure qualities of *sattva*.

 *Thy Beauty do we worship, to Thee do we give willing surrender.*

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<sup>6</sup> From the Nekbakht Archives.

<sup>7</sup> Q 7:180: *God's are the most beautiful Names*. See also Mansur Johnson: *Die before Death*. The Einstein Academy, 2022, p. 37 – 39 for a complete comparison between *Saum* and possible wazifas.

As another Hadith of paramount importance on the Sufi path states, God is beautiful and loves Beauty. 'To surrender' is the translation of the word *islam*, but is also a necessary step on the Indian path of devotion (*bhakti*).

🦋 *Most Merciful and Compassionate God, the Idealized Lord of the whole humanity*

Merciful and Compassionate can be seen as a translation of the Quranic *rahman* and *rahim*. Every chapter of the Quran but one opens with these words (*bismillah arahman arahim*), the *basmalah*. Only in Sura al-Fatiha this line is part of the Sura itself.

🦋 *Thee only do we worship and towards Thee alone we aspire.*

This line comes very close to the fourth line of Sura al-Fatiha: *We pray only to Thee and only ask Thee for help.*

🦋 *Open our hearts towards Thy Beauty, illuminate our souls with Divine Light.*

This line designates the heart as our alchemistic workshop, typical for the Sufi path and also for the Hindu chakra system, where heaven and earth, Shiva and Shakti, meet in the heart, symbolized by the *yantra* (geometrical image) for the heart chakra with two intertwined triangles, one pointing upwards and one pointing downwards. This makes the heart the place to receive the light of understanding for our spiritual growth.

🦋 *O Thou, the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty,*

The perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty is core of the Message, as expressed in the Invocation, and at the same time a signpost for the path towards perfecting our humanity.

🦋 *All-powerful Creator, Sustainer, Judge and Forgiver of our shortcomings*

Although not present in the original Indian song, the reference to the Indian Trimurti (Brahma as the Creator-God, Vishnu as the Sustainer-God, Shiva as the Destroyer-God) – is clear. The emphasis for Shiva is on Forgiving, the theme of the third line of Sura al-Fatiha, which refers to the Day of Judgment.

🦋 *Lord God of the East and of the West, of the worlds above and below, and of the seen and unseen beings.*

This line again shows again a reference with Sura al-Fatiha, which in the second line talks about the *rabbi l-alam*, the Lord of all Worlds, i.e. the seen physical world and the unseen world of *jinns* and *angels*. Traditional Islam asks all followers to believe in these beings. As explained in Inayat Khan's *The Soul, Whence and Whither?*, they play a specific role in Sufi cosmology.

🦋 *Pour upon us Thy Love and Thy Light*

Love and Light symbolize the two wings of Love and Understanding of the Sufi path, corresponding with the Indian paths of *bhakti* and *jnana*.

🦋 *Give sustenance to our bodies, hearts and souls*

This is Inayat Khan's more or less standard reference to the Vedic concept of the three worlds, the physical world, the psychological (mental-emotional) world, and the spiritual world. Sustenance can be seen as a reference to the Islamic *rabb* (the Sustainer).

🦋 *Use us for the purpose that Thy wisdom chooseth,*

This is a direct quote from the original song. In Arabic, the words for praying (*abd*) also means to serve, so in both traditions serving humanity is a way to worship the Divine.

🕊️ *And guide us on the path of Thine Own Goodness.*

This refers to the original blessing that is innate to the Islamic world view.

🕊️ *Draw us closer to Thee, every moment of our life, until in us be reflected*

This line can be seen as an expression of the Sufi ideal of nearness (*qurb*).

🕊️ *Thy Grace, Thy Glory, Thy Wisdom, Thy Joy and Thy Peace.*

Different wazifas and Sufi concepts (*rahman*, *alhamdulillah*, *ma'rifa*, and *salam*) with the Hindu ideal of *ananda* as Joy.

## Salat

*Salat* is the common Arabic word for the Islamic obligatory prayer, five times a day. *Salat* means prayer, worship or invocation. The word is widely used in the Quran, also in the meaning of blessing (e.g. Q 33:56). In India, the Persian *namaz* (of which the Indian greeting *namaste* is derived) is also used.

Through *Salat* we pray to the One and ask for blessings. As Inayat Khan's prayer makes clear, blessing comes from the One with human beings as medium. The Prophets and Saints function as the main medium, but each one of us on our own level can also function as such.

*Salat* is dedicated to Vishnu, implying that we address the One in his function as our Sustainer (*rabb*). In this function, the One has sent Prophets (in Middle Eastern tradition) or *avatars* (in Indian tradition) to sustain us by reviving the Message in times of need and darkness.

The source of inspiration for Salat is the English translation of the following Indian song:

*Most gracious Lord, Messiah, Master, Inspirer  
and saviour of humanity.  
Thy Light is in all forms – Thy love in all:  
the mother and father, the teacher and friend.  
Star that shineth in Thy heart, let shine  
in the hearts of Thy faithful and sincere devotees.  
May the Message reach far into the world  
Illuminating the whole humanity.*

And here is the final version of Inayat Khan:

*Most gracious Lord, Master, Messiah,  
and Savior of humanity  
We greet Thee with all humility.  
Thou art the first Cause and the Last Effect,  
the Divine Light and the Spirit of Guidance,  
Alpha and Omega.  
Thy Light is in all forms, Thy Love in all beings:  
in a loving mother, in a kind father,  
in an innocent child, in a helpful friend,  
in an inspiring teacher.*

*Allow us to recognize Thee  
in all Thy holy names and forms:  
as Rama, as Krishna, as Shiva, as Buddha.  
Let us know Thee as Abraham, as Solomon, as Zarathustra,  
as Moses, as Jesus, as Mohammed  
and in many other names and forms,  
known and unknown to the world.  
We adore Thy past,  
Thy presence deeply enlightens our being,  
and we look for Thy blessing in the future.  
O Messenger, Christ, Nabi, the Rasul of God!  
Thou whose heart constantly reacheth upward,  
Thou comest on earth with a message,  
as a dove from above,  
when Dharma decayeth,  
and speakest the Word that is put into Thy mouth,  
as the light filleth the crescent moon.  
Let the star of the Divine Light shining in Thy heart  
be reflected in the hearts of Thy devotees.  
May the Message of God reach far and wide,  
illuminating and making the whole humanity  
as one single Brotherhood in the Fatherhood of God.*

For reason of comparison, Inayat Khan's original version is offered here. Both the Ruhaniat and the Inayatiyya have published a more gender inclusive version of this prayer, called *Salawat*.<sup>8</sup>

As with Saum, the inspiration is undeniable. They also shine light upon Inayat Khan's additions, such as:

*We greet Thee with all humility.  
Thou art the first Cause and the Last Effect,  
the Divine Light and the Spirit of Guidance,  
Alpha and Omega.*

Humility (*khushu'*) is an important Sufi ideal, covered by all classical handbooks, and of equal importance on the Indian *bhakti* path. The capitalized epithets again refer to wazifas (*awwal* and *akhir*, *nur*, and *hadi*), whereas the Alpha and Omega have a clear Christian connotation, already hinting towards the religiously inclusive list of Prophets and Avatars.

*The Bhakti Path: Thy Light is in all Forms*

It may come as a surprise that the well-known *Thy Light is in all forms* is not an original phrase of Inayat Khan, but is derived almost literally from the Indian *bhakti* song.

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<sup>8</sup> See our *Draw us Closer* for this prayer, inspired by Salat.

Similar to the Middle Eastern monotheisms, *bhakti* places God outside of creation. Therefore in India, with its monistic Advaita Vedanta, *bhakti* is seen as a dualistic faith.

A main difference between *bhakti* and the monotheisms, is that the Divine can incarnate in a human being and saints sometimes are seen as incarnated God.

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna says:

[F]irst comes *bhakti*; then *bhava*, when *bhakti* is mature. Higher than *bhava* are *maha-bhava* [ecstatic love] and *prema* [divine love of the most intense kind]. An ordinary mortal does not attain *maha-bhava* and *prema*. One who has achieved these has realized the goal, that is to say, has attained God.<sup>9</sup>

*Bhava*, rapture, ecstasy, or intense love, is an important concept within the *bhakti* movement. As the Glossary to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* explains:

*Bhava* denotes any one of the five attitudes that a dualistic worshipper assumes toward God. The first of these attitudes is that of peace; assuming the other four, the devotee regards God as the Mother, Child, Friend, or Beloved.<sup>10</sup>

The Upanishads, which were notated half a millennium before the rise of the *Bhakti* movement, already advise us to 'see the Divine in your mother, father, teacher and guest,'<sup>11</sup> so seeing love and light in *a loving mother, a kind father, an innocent child, a helpful friend, and an inspiring teacher*, has a venerable pedigree.

### *Prophets and Avatars*

The lines *Allow us to recognize Thee with all the holy names and forms* is typical for the unique approach of Inayat Khan. The Quran recognizes the Torah with the Hebrew prophets, and the Gospels with Jesus and Maria (albeit as human beings), but sees the Indian Avatars, the incarnated Gods who walked the earth, as idols to be shunned.

Likewise, the Christian Trinity is seen as a sin, as *shirk* – associating partners with Allah and thus denying *tawhid*, the unique Oneness of the Divine. Traditionalists use Sura al-Ikhlās to prove their point. As we saw above, this is the Sura that Inayat Khan and his Companions would recite thrice before every meditation.<sup>12</sup>

Inayat Khan places the Avatars, the Prophets, Jesus, and the Buddha (in some *bhakti* traditions honored as an Avatar of Vishnu) on one and the same level. He is not unique in this, as he had Chishti predecessors. In a number of places the Quran tells us that every people had its prophet, and that the Message that the Prophet Muhammad received is the same as the message that Abraham, Moses, and Jesus received. Still, praying the names of Avatars and Prophets in one breath is a genuine revolution.

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9 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 485.

10 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 1031.

11 *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Part I, 11, 2. Eknath Easwaran: *The Upanishads*. Nilgiri Press, 2007, p. 251.

12 See our *Attunement, Direction, and Forgiving. Meditation on Sura al-Fatiha* and our website (Papers) for a more inclusive interpretation of this Sura.

### *Dharma in Decay*

This line is an addition of Inayat Khan. Interestingly enough, inspiration didn't guide him towards the Quran or another Sufi source, but toward the Bhagavad Gita, for this line is an almost direct quote from this 'Celestial Song':

*When dharma is in decay and a-dharma flourishes,  
O Bharata, then I create myself.*<sup>13</sup>

In traditional Indian belief, the *avatars* are incarnations of Lord Vishnu, to whom this prayer *Salat* is dedicated. Elsewhere in the Gita (VII: 7), Lord Krishna says, 'I am in every religion, like the thread in a necklace of pearls.'

Krishna refers to himself as *avatar* of Lord Vishnu, but as we saw, Inayat Khan widens this view and sees all prophets and avatars as 'Saviors of humanity who keep the light aloft or rekindle the light in times of darkness (a-dharma).'

### *As a dove from above*

The dove in the next phrase is again an addition from Inayat Khan, using the well-known symbol of the dove. In Judaism, the dove stands for good tidings (the Arc of Noah, Genesis 8: 11). In Christianity, it is symbol of the Holy Spirit who descended upon Jesus after his baptism (Matthew 3: 16, Luke 3: 22).

In Western culture this has led to the more general image of the dove as symbol for spiritual peace. For Inayat Khan, the dove also represents the soul that never forgets where it came from and always returns home.<sup>14</sup>

### *May the Message of God reach far and Wide*

As with *Thy Light is in all forms*, it may come as a surprise that the line *May the Message of God reach far and wide* is not originally Inayat Khan, as he named his teachings 'the Message'. At his last Summer School, he expressed his deep wish that 'the Message' would reach India, so the circle would be completed. He also made clear that the Message was more important than the organization behind it:

Yes, it happens that the Message born of the school is destined to reach far and wide. That gives us a different task, of spreading the Message; which stands apart from the Sufi order which is our esoteric school. But the idea is that the Sufi School is one thing, and the Sufi Message is another thing. If the Sufi School is spreading in India, of course it will make it easy for us. But it is the Sufi Message that must spread there.<sup>15</sup>

This line also features in the *Confraternity*. As proselytizing is alien to Sufism, this is not an invitation to spread the word to anyone in word and writing, but rather to spread the Message by example, by living the teachings and radiating them through one's being into the world.

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13 Bhagavad Gita IV: 7.

14 *The Unity of Religious Ideals*. IX: p. 225 – 226, *The Symbol of the Dove*. This is in keeping with the Quranic saying that we all will return to the One (e.g. Q 45: 15). For more on this journey of the soul, see *The Soul, Whence and Whither?*.

15 Collective Interview, June 17, 1924 and August 23, 1926.

The final 'brotherhood' or – as we now would say – 'brother- and sisterhood' or 'family' in the 'Parenthood' of God is a reflection of the classical Sufi Orders, which were seen as brotherhoods. It also would have rung a bell of recognition with the many former Theosophists that followed Inayat Khan.