

Prayer of the Universel



As Inayat Khan told one of his students, his long-time vision was to construct a building for his Message. This home for the Message had to be built on the different levels of existence. Toward the end of his life, he made the purpose and construction of this building clear in his prayer for the Universel:

*O Thou,
the Maker, Moulder, and Builder of the Universe
build with Thine own Hands the Universel
for Thine divine Message of Love, Harmony, and Beauty.*

In this prayer, Inayat Khan summarizes the work of constructing and creating by addressing the One as Maker, Moulder and Builder. With this address, he follows the classical Sufi understanding of the different phases of Creation. We'll return to this process of creation near the end of this essay.

Once upon a time, there was a master builder, working for a large company. When the time of his retirement came, his boss asked him for his last assignment to design and build for a secret admirer of his work the house of his dreams. Money was not an issue and he could use the best material available. With enthusiasm the man set to work and made the most beautiful design. Gold, silver, ebony and rosewood, in his vision he would only use the best materials. The design finished, he started to build.

However, realizing that this was his last job, he decided to put some money aside for himself by saving on the construction, while charging for the expensive material. The house would not be as solid, but no one would notice. Gradually, he cut more and more corners. Gold became gold-colored, the wood looked wonderful, but was of inferior quality.

When the house was finished, it looked wonderful, but he knew he for sure didn't want to live in it, knowing what was behind the surface. What did it matter? He would be retired soon!

His boss came to check on the finished house and told the man, 'You have been a wonderful employee and all my clients were more than content with your work. So I decided to reward you. The house of your dreams that you have built is for you, so you can have a careless retirement in the house of your dreams.'¹

As in the process of incarnation, every new phase materializes more of the vision, but also makes the original vision less flexible, as a blueprint is more easily adapted than a concrete building with solid walls.

Summer School Lectures

Working from his first blueprint, Inayat Khan adapted and improvised – as he was used to do as a classically trained Indian raga musician – to find the design that



Summer School 1921

would work best for his western audiences and students and would serve his vision.

Towards the end of his life, with all his lectures preserved by shorthand and many of them already available in print, he took a next step towards explaining his students the deeper meaning of his vision, his legacy for the future. At the Summer School, 1924, he addressed his mureeds (students) and told them:

The work which we are doing just now is that of making a building, a building in which to preserve the Message for the time when humanity will be wakened to appreciate it, to value it; that it may not be too difficult to find it, for it is preserved somewhere in the building so made. And what is this building? It is the building which may be called in other words an embodiment of the Illuminated souls. Its parts and particles are those who are born to serve God and humanity, who are meant to give their life to the service of the Cause. And it is this building which is a sacred temple, and it is this building to which our life and our work is dedicated.

At the next Summer School, he guided his students towards this understanding that everything on the spiritual or esoteric plane needs an earthly component:

We are constructing something, we are building something in the air. And this building is not a building for a certain time. This building is built for centuries to come... It is our thoughts and our feelings which will serve in this temple as stones and bricks and tiles, and it is our feelings which will hold this temple for centuries to come... Every mureed has a contribution to make to this temple, and the best contribution one can make is one's devotion, one's faith in the Message, one's sincere service to the Cause, one's sympathy, one's friendship with Murshid...

But then one begins to think, 'Why is it that there is so much talk about a temple to be made on the earth?' The answer is that everything that is to be built on a spiritual plane is finished when it is also built on the physical plane.²

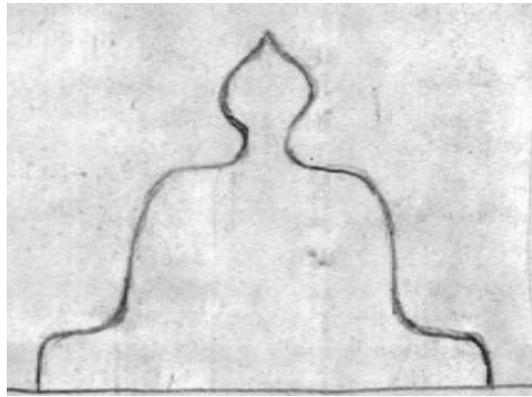
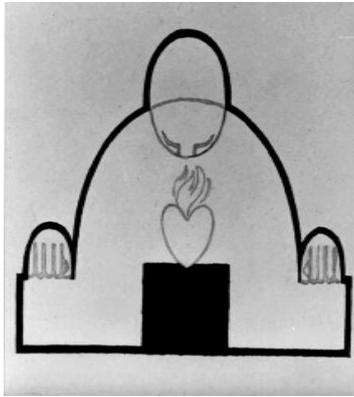
As we wrote in *Draw us closer*, again one year later, at his last Summer School before leaving for his motherland India, where he was to die on February 5, 1927, he laid the foundation stone for an actual building. He placed coins from all countries with Sufi centers under the stone.³

He named it Universel – after the French *temple universelle* – as the world already had enough churches and cathedrals and needed a place to live for the universal Spirit in all its aspects, from religion to culture and art. For him the Message was the Spirit and this Spirit needed a body to be able to live on earth.

Vision of the Universel

Already in 1921, Inayat Khan imagined the building to be modeled after four Buddha-shaped figures in meditation, sitting back-to-back towards the four directions, thus forming a circle. This came as a vision in a dream.

As he explained, the soul lives in the human body and the human form is the highest form that God has created. The head of these figures was to be the dome, the highest part the sphere of the angels. The shoulders and the middle part represented the sphere of the djinns and the lower part (the legs) represented the earth.⁴



Left: Drawing by H. Willebeek le Mair (Saida van Tuyll) of Zikr Card after Inayat Khan's instructions, April 1921. Right: The design of the Universel (right) by Bhanki van Stolk after this drawing.⁵

Superficially seen, the Universel was designed as a temple for the Universal Worship, but on a deeper level the Universel was to be the crown of his work, for which he coined the word the Message. This Message of Love, Harmony and Beauty was larger than his Sufi School – often called Western or Universal Sufism to emphasize its non-dogmatic aspect and openness to all creeds and beliefs:

No doctrines, dogmas or principles Sufis stands, calling them its own. The Sufi says: 'Wisdom does not belong to me alone, or my sect; it cannot be labeled with the word 'Sufi'. Wisdom belongs to the human race, wisdom belongs to God. I, as any other being, desire to understand better, every day more and more.

And it is my pleasure and privilege to share what I consider good and beautiful with my fellowmen'. Never in the history of the world has Sufism been made a sect which wanted to make many of the same sect. It has never been, nor will it ever be. It is an esoteric school of long tradition; it remains as such. 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.⁶

These quotes make clear that Inayat Khan's vision was greater than creating an esoteric school for his Universal Sufism or offering a Universal Worship to celebrate the Unity of religious Ideals.

His vision was to create a world-wide brother- and sisterhood of spiritual freedom beyond the limitations of initiation and esoteric schools, a 'kinship' where all faiths and denominations would be welcome, tolerated, accepted and even honored.⁷

He wanted humanity to be raised above the differences and distinctions that divide, so we can be united in God's perfect being, as he says in his prayer Khatum.



Universel in Katwijk, Netherlands

For the earthly side of his vision, Inayat Khan first created the Sufi Movement as an earthly organization. As he said to one of his students, asking him why he needed an organization, 'If you don't put your perfume in a bottle, it gets lost.' For the spiritual side, he dictated a series of teachings for different grades of spiritual development, the Gathas, Githas, Sangathas and Sangithas.

The most tangible part of his vision, a temple built as the Universel, was one of his deepest wishes, but he didn't live to see the realization of an actual built Universel.

From Vision to earthly Reality



Without going into details, the address of the Prayer for the Universel, 'O Thou the Maker, Moulder and Builder of the Universe', shows a remarkable resemblance to the three main wazifas⁸ for creation, *al-Khaliq* (the Creator), *al-Bari* (the Maker or Evolver) and *al-Musawwir* (the Fashioner of Forms). The process that these wazifas picture is the process of creation, starting with a vision, going through one or more stages of designing, making this

vision more concrete, and ends with the actual construction. In this process, the vision has the widest scope and every step towards making the vision more concrete automatically and by definition means the sacrifice of some of the potentialities and possibilities in order for other potentialities and possibilities to become an actual reality.

The same idea can be found in the Kabbala, which recognizes four levels of existence, symbolically represented as the process of building a house. This starts – as any undertaking – with an idea, the blueprint. This idea gradually materializes through different stages of designing, leading to the actual building of the structure of the house and ends with the finishing touch, beautifying the house and making it a comfortable place to live in.

As we related in *Draw us closer*, Inayat Khan never saw an actual Universel being built on earth. He only succeeded in laying a symbolic foundation stone for the Universel during a ceremony at the last Summer School in 1926.

He saw the very beginning of the spiritual side of his vision during his years on earth, although his work was slow and often misunderstood, also by most of his students. When someone remarked the great need of the Sufi Movement was money, Inayat Khan replied, 'Money is a dead thing, workers are living things, and

more precious... Our greatest need is workers, faithful workers, with balance, with tact, with equilibrium, and with a desire to serve the cause. What I am asking today is ten thousand servers to begin our work.⁹

Aware of the immenseness of the task to 'spread the Message far and wide', he nonetheless had no doubt and was not deterred to continue his work against all odds: 'I am sure that the one who is destined by God to serve humanity will certainly get the help which is so needed.'¹⁰ His vision was not a utopia, build on nowhere-land.¹¹ As he said in 1923, 'If it were a human enterprise there could have been a doubt whether it would be accomplished or not. It must be accomplished and it will be accomplished.'¹²

Since Inayat Khan left this earth, several buildings called 'Universel' have been built. These buildings don't make the prayer for the Universel redundant, as the spiritual building, what Inayat Khan called 'the Message', is far from finished.

On a positive note, every symbolical stone, brick, and tile that we add on to this spiritual building, held together by the mortar of *'ishq* (love) for both the Message and its Messenger is another stone for a spiritual construction that is designed for centuries to come. This Message is not only spread by Inayat Khan, but in many different forms by other spiritual visionaries and mystics who on a deeper level all work together towards creating an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding, of peace and unity for all human beings in the realization that – as Thich Nhat Hanh puts it – we inter-are and that the whole humanity is like one single body that feels the pain when a limb or organ is damaged or hurt.

Music and Meditation

Em Am7 D Em
Thou who art the Maker, Moul- der and Buil- der of the U- ni- verse

G F E F G
Build with Thine own Hands the U- ni- ver- sel

Bb G F C G
For Thine di- vi- -ne Mes- sage of Love, Har- mo- ny and Beau- - -ty

Tekst Hazrat Inayat Khan
Music W&A van der Zwan

Meditation

Inayat Khan considered Harmony the core of the Message. Earthly love leads to harmony and thus creates Divine Beauty, whereas beauty creates harmony and thus leads to Divine Love.

Whether you start with early love or Divine Love, with earthly beauty of Divine Beauty, always Harmony is the central agent and binding force.

1. Concentrate on Love, Harmony and Beauty. Breathe Love into the heart. Hold the breath in the heart and feel how this love can harmonize you. Now breathe this feeling out into the world as Beauty.
Reverse the process by breathing Beauty into the heart, then hold the breath in the heart on Harmony, and breathe out Love.
2. Let go of the structure and breathe with the feeling, contemplating what you can add to the world towards perfecting Love, Harmony and Beauty in all realms of existence.

Wali van der Zwan
Addendum from *Thy Light is in all Forms*
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¹ Chassidic story, oral transmission.

² *Message Papers*, July 21, 1925. For gender neutrality, 'his' is replaced by 'one's'.

³ *Inayat Khan, a biography*, p. 241.

⁴ Generalizing, the earthly sphere (*Nasut*) is the sphere of nature. The sphere of the *jinns* (*Malakut*) is the world of thought, imagination, and pure knowledge (gnosis, *jnana*). The sphere of the angels (*Jabarut*) represents the world of power and pure love. Above these spheres is Lahut, the sphere of the Divine. See *Unity and Diversity*, p. 198/9 for more on the Sufi ideas on cosmology and the three worlds. See also Inayat Khan's *The Soul, Whence and Whither?* (Volume I).

⁵ Archive Sufi Museum, The Hague. Saidi van Tuyll also made sketches for a Universel. However, they are too faded to show much beyond the dome shaped top of the building.

⁶ Collective Interview, June 17, 1924 and August 23, 1926.

⁷ *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* was the title of Inayat Khan's first book, published in 1914. Inayat Khan's eldest child, Noor-u-nissa, born in that same year in Moscow gave her life for this ideal of spiritual Liberty, serving as allied spy in occupied Paris. She died in 1944 in Dachau. Her last word was '*Liberté!*'

⁸ Wazifas are the so-called Beautiful Names of the One, divine Qualities that – comparable to Plato's Ideas – on earthly level reflect the Divine Reality.

⁹ *Sangathas Series III, Nasihat*. SRI PDF, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Utopia* means no (from the Greek *ou*) place (from the Greek *topos*).

¹² Address to Cherags, August 13, 1923.