

Inner Call Podcast #173 The Church of All is a School July 31, 2022

A hundred years ago, more or less, Hazrat Inayat Khan was staying with mureeds in the Dutch seaside village of Katwijk, and on one Sunday in September, he spoke some words of explanation to them following a service of the still very new 'Church of All,' or the Universal Worship. He told them, "You may call the Church of All a church because we offer prayers, but I call it a school where we learn the lesson of all religions, an assembly gathered in devotion."

When we speak of learning, we might recall our own first encounter with this form of worship – for many, it was like the opening of a new door to understanding, a light-filled revelation that different faiths can each be treated with the same dignity and respect. If we assemble in devotion, as Hazrat Inayat says, and we are willing to study without preconceptions or prejudices – the first necessity of being a student – we will surely learn that in spite of the variety of forms and scriptures, the essence of all the religions is the same. The lesson of this school is that there is truly only one religion, and all different faiths are manifestations of it, suited externally to the characteristics of different cultures and societies. When we dispute about forms or doctrines, we lose sight of the truth that should unite us all in one single family. Instead of serving beauty, by arguing we commit ourselves to the slavery of division.

In this connection, we can celebrate the news that a few days ago the Sufi Movement successfully concluded its first online training course for cherags and candidate cherags. 'Cherag', a word that means lamp, is the name given to those who perform the service, and if these light-bearers do not learn the lesson of all religions, then there is little hope that they can transmit this truth to a wider public.

The course was years in the making, and was built by the labour of a number of talented, patient and persistent devotees, involving an uncountable number of hours in zoom meetings. The endeavour was based on a series of modules written by an Australian mureed, Safa Hull, but since the course was aimed at Spanish-speaking students, it had to first be translated, and then converted from its print form to a series of online presentations, all placed within the framework of Google Classroom.

The course ran through sixteen weeks, with regular assignments as well as personal journal work, and it was demanding. Students were asked to investigate religions with which they were unfamiliar, and to learn about the meaning and symbolism of the Universal Worship service. They had to prepare an altar, search for scriptures, and write a sermon – a first for many of the students. They were also asked to look deeply into their own hearts to consider questions such as the meaning of devotion, and what their personal commitment is to serve the message.

Inevitably, some students dropped out along the way – we may start a course with the best intentions, but circumstances can change. Our initial enrolment was over 40 from Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Spain, and the attendance at the final session was near 30. Far more meaningful than the numbers, though, were the comments of some of the students in our wrap-up session. They were deeply moved by the experience, and by the community they had discovered. Many had tears as they talked about their own transformation in the process.

The truth is, these students have begun to experience the reality of which Hazrat Inayat Khan spoke, when he said, "Therefore every member of the Church of All who is deeply impressed by the ideal with which this activity has been working, must consider himself not only a member of the Church of All, but a worker of this movement, a worker with wisdom, with gentleness... The work of the members of the Church of All is of a very delicate and very gentle character. But it is a hope that the members of our blessed Order, who are blessed by wisdom, who are blessed by all the Teachers of humanity ... when they sincerely wish to serve God and humanity in this direction, they will surely be guided and blessed."