

A READER'S JOURNAL:

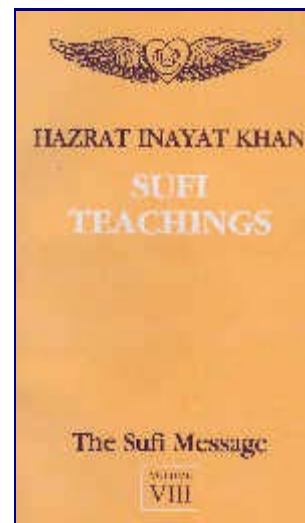


**Sufi Teachings: The Art of Being, Volume 8 by
Hazrat Inayat Khan**

Volume VIII of The Sufi Message

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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2000



When in the early 1980's, I first discovered Hazrat Inayat Khan, I fell in love with his teachings, and read all that I could locate of the twelve volume Mastery Series, a collection of his works. By 1987, I had located all but Volume VIII. During that year I read the last of the eleven volumes: Volume V, [Spiritual Liberty](#). Recently I discovered a review in my 1987 journal of that volume and published it. Now, thanks to

bibliofind.com on the Internet, I was able to locate my one missing volume, Volume VIII, *Sufi Teachings*, in India and ordered a copy. Here is my review of that book.

What is a Sufi? And why study Sufi teachings? The doctrine of the Sufi is "Know thyself and thou wilt know God." Thus Khan tells us, "Sufism is the study of the self." Okay, you may be thinking, but so what? Is it a religion, a weird sect, some Mohammedan cult? No, it's none of those, and what it is, well, that's hard to get a handle on. Here's how Hazrat Inayat Khan traces the history, condensed from his words in the Chapter "History of the Sufis":

[page 13, 14] Sufism has never had a first exponent or a historical origin. It existed from the beginning, because man has always possessed the light which is his second nature; and light in its higher aspect may be called the knowledge of God, the divine wisdom - in fact, Sufism. . . . At the time of Christ there were Sufis among the first of those who gave heed to him, and in the time of Mohammad the Sufis on Mount Zafah were the first to respond to his cry. One of the explanations of the term Sufi is this association with Mount Zafah. Mohammad was the first to open the way for them in Arabia . . . Sufism then spread to Persia. But whenever the Sufis expressed their free thought, they were attacked by the established religions, and so Sufism found its outlet in poetry and music.

The Sufi accepts the ideals of both Christ and Mohammed, understands the concepts of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, is influenced by Zarathustra, by Abraham, by Moses, by King David's songs, by the Koran, by the Hindu Vedanta, and by the Bible.

[page 20] The Sufi sees the one truth in all forms. If anyone asks a Sufi to come and offer prayer in the Christian church, he is ready to do so. If some one would like to take him to the synagogue and ask him to pray as the Jews do, he would be quite willing; and among Muslims he will offer Nimaz as they do. In the Hindu temple he sees the same God, the living God, in the place of the idol; and the temple of Buddha inspires him instead of blinding him with idolatry. Yet his true mosque will be his heart in which the Beloved lives, who is worshipped by both Muslim and Kufr alike.

To sum it all up, the name "Sufi" comes from *Sáf* which means *pure* in Arabic. It is a name that was given to them by others not one that they gave themselves. Sufism, rightly understood, is truly a spiritual

doctrine of freedom and light.

As Gregory Bateson might say, "That reminds me of a story." There was a great Sufi teacher known for his great works and teaching. Once he prescribed a vegetarian diet for a young man. His mother heard about this and was upset, so she went to talk to the teacher and there was chicken in front of him on the dinner table.

[page 47] So the mother said, "You are teaching your pupils to live on a vegetarian diet and you yourself are enjoying chicken!" Upon this the teacher uncovered the dish, and the chicken flew away; and he said, "The day when your son too can do this, he may eat chicken!"

A delightful Sufi story tells of Nasruddin who was made judge for a day. The prosecutor told the court all the crimes that he accused the defendant of committing, and as soon as he was finished his pleading for a conviction, Nasruddin looked at him earnestly and said, "I do believe you are right!" The Bailiff quickly reminded Nasruddin that the defense had not been heard from, so the defense attorney came forward to plead his case for his client's innocence. And a very eloquent plea it was! When he finished Nasruddin looked the defense attorney in the eye and said, "I do believe you are right!" The Bailiff said to Nasruddin, "But Judge, they can't *both* be right!" Nasruddin looked at the Bailiff and said, "I do believe you are right!" Somewhere along my readings of Hazrat Inayat Khan and Idries Shah's Sufi stories, I formulated Matherne's Rule #6 "All Meanings Are True" or AMAT. Notice how it applies in the following passage from this book as well:

[page 55] A spiritual soul is an old soul, according to Eastern terminology. Even a young person who is spiritually minded shows the nature of the aged; but at the same time spirituality is perpetual youth. A spiritual person admires all things, appreciate all things, enjoys all things to the full. Therefore, if one says the spiritual person is like an old person it is true; and if one says the spiritual person is like a young person that is true also.

Khan reminds us that Christ taught, "Resist not evil," and says that inharmony creates more inharmony. What causes inharmony? "Weakness. Physical weakness or mental weakness, but it is always weakness." (Page 59) This reminds me of some great advice I got once: "Don't take counsel from your fears. Do *not* make decisions while you are tired." The inharmony that stems from the weakness of fatigue will only lead to more inharmony. There are few decisions that cannot be safely postponed until one is refreshed in mind and body. One truly learns this lesson only when one looks within oneself for the source of the problem that seems to be arising from someone else. This is the process that psychologists name, "projection." Khan gives a good description of projection in the next passage:

[page 67] Our worst enemy is our self, our faults, our weaknesses, and our limitations. And our mind is a traitor. It hides our faults even from our own eyes, and points to other people as the reason for all our difficulties. Thus it constantly deludes us, keeping us unaware of the real enemy, and urging us against others, to fight them, making us think that they are our enemies.

Khan suggests that resignation and struggle are the two means by which one can reach one's spiritual goals. But a foolish resignation is not advisable. Here's another story:

[page 70] A mureed, who was learning the lesson of resignation from a murshid, was once walking in the middle of the road engrossed in the thought of resignation when a mad elephant came from the other directions. A wise man told him to get out of the way, but he would not because he was trying to resign himself to the elephant, until he was roughly pushed aside by it. They brought him to his murshid who asked him how he came to be injured. He answered that he was practising resignation. The murshid said, "But did nobody tell you to get out of the way?" "Yes," he answered, "but I would not

**listen." "But," said the murshid, "why did you not resign yourself to that person?"
Often fine principles can be practised to great disadvantage.**

"Resignation," Khan tells us, "has the nature of water: if anything obstructs it it takes another course; and yet it flows on, making its way so as to meet the ocean in the end." The book is filled with quotable thoughts. "Civilization itself is really only a developed sense of renunciation which manifests itself in our consideration for each other." "When virtues control a man's life they become idols; and it is not idols that we should worship; it is the ideal behind the idol." (Pages 78, 79)

Some years ago I'd noticed that most of the things that people want or seek are not worth having. A good example is people who want to win the lottery - the sudden impact of a huge amount of money will greatly upset and disturb the lives of those that want this the most. This is seen in the many cases in which the lottery money is soon all spent and the person is reduced to living once more exactly as before. I conjured up in my mind the idea of doing "Want Development" seminars in which people would learn to create wants that would bring harmony into their life and discard their current wants that are often the very source of their present disharmony. I cannot truthfully recall if my idea came before I encountered an idea similar to the below passage in an earlier book of Hazrat Inayat Khan's.

[page 82] The difference between people is according to the wishes they have. One wishes for the earth, the other wishes for heaven. The desire of the one takes him to the height of spiritual progress, and the desire of the other takes him to the depths of the earth. Man is great or small, wise or foolish, on the right road or on the wrong road, according to the desire he has.

"But," some one among you is saying, " isn't it okay to want things and to pray to God to receive them? Doesn't God listen to my prayers and want me to have what's good for me? And 224 million dollars, I just know, would be good for me!"

[page 85] The answer is that prayer is a reminder to God, prayer is a song before God, who enjoys it, who hears it, who is reminded about something. But how can our prayer, our insignificant voice, reach God? It reaches God through our ears. God is within us. If our soul can hear our voice God can hear it too. Prayer is the best way, because then the wish is put in a beautiful form which harmonizes with God, and which brings about a closer relationship between God and man.

Rightly understood prayer is a dance we do with God, a song we sing with God, and an understanding we come to with God about how best to bring harmony into our lives. And in that harmony there is room for a fervent wish, one that we keep in mind as part of our relationship with God. There is a caveat, however - as Khan puts it on page 85, "The one who thinks hard about his wish destroys it; it is just like overheating something or giving too much water to a plant. It is destroyed by the very thing which should help it. A wish must be cherished easily, with comfort, with hope, with confidence, and with patience." Anything else is out of harmony and we have ended the dance. Another saying that I encountered years ago sums it up beautifully: "Success is getting what we want and happiness is wanting what we get." Always and in every way we must experience happiness with what we have or we will lose what little we have.

"But how can I be happy when all these people are bringing misery into my world?" This question is the signal for a little ecological check of one's own thoughts. It is all too easy watching the network news programs every night to think evil thoughts about the criminals whose deeds are featured in detail in these programs.

[page 94] It is not that God gives us a certain punishment, but that by our wickedness, by our evil thoughts, we attract towards us the same wickedness, the same evil thoughts from others. The evil we do brings the same evil upon us from others.

Perhaps you have noticed, dear Reader, and wondered also why it is that so many heroes of fiction have a

seemingly half-witted sidekick that accompanies them. An easy answer would be to say that one Pancho Sanchez is worth a dozen Iago's - that is, a faithful companion is worth much more than a treacherous one. Khan puts it simply, "A wise man would rather have a foolish servant than a half-wise one who will question his orders."

The seed is the plant in the microcosm and the flowering stage of the plant is the plant in the macrocosm. Yet the seed as microcosm lives within the flower as macrocosm. If we are to learn about the spirit that lives in the human being we each are, we must come to see the spirit as the seed in the microcosm of the human being and the human being as the seed in the flower of God in the macrocosm. (Inspired by "Man, the Seed of God, page 123.)

As hinted above, God grants our wishes, fulfills our desires when we are most in harmony with God. Here Khan gives us two times when God grants our wishes, and both of them are times when we are most in harmony with God.

[page 129] God grants us our wishes at two different times. One is when our heart is free from every thought and feeling and maintained in a most peaceful and tranquil condition. At that time every wish we may have is just like a seed sown in the right season. And if we have the patience and strength to wait and trust in the great power of God, whatever the wish may be it will certainly be granted. The other time is when we are satisfied, when we are very happy. Whatever wish we have during that period will be granted, just as the rain coming from above at the proper time will bring with it fruit and flowers.

[Matherne's Rule #25](#) asks "What is the power of an unanswered question?" Here's Hazrat Inayat Khan's take on the power of unanswered questions:

[page 130] There is a stage in the evolution of a man's life when every question is answered by the life around him. He may have a living being before him, or be surrounded by nature; he may be awake or asleep, but the answer to his question comes as an echo of the question itself. Just as certain things become an accommodation for the air, turning it into a sound, so everything becomes an accommodation for each thought of the sage, helping it to resound; and in this resonance there is an answer. In point of fact the answer is contained in the question itself. A question has no existence without an answer. It is man's limited vision that makes him see only the question without the answer.

Thus one of the powers of an *unanswered question* comes from the holding of a question — not accepting the easy answer — until the true answer comes to us from a vision that is greater than our own.

In a recent review of [The Theosophy of the Rosicrucian](#) by Rudolf Steiner, I wrote the following: "In another synchronicity of concepts, Jung said that in every male was a female spirit he called the *anima* and in every female, a male spirit he called the *animus*. Compare that with the following passage from Steiner: [from page 23] 'I tell you that the etheric body in the male is female and in the female, male. Without this knowledge much will remain incomprehensible in practical life.'" Now compare Hazrat Inayat Khan's statement of the principle underlying the *anima* and *animus*:

[page 130] While all things have their opposites, it is also true that in each the spirit of the opposite exists. In man the quality of woman exists; in woman the spirit of man. In the sun the form of the moon exists, in the moon the light of the sun. The closer one approaches reality, the nearer one comes to unity.

Note how *anima*, etheric body, and quality are three different terms or maps used to describe one territory.

Also note that a *quality* can have an objective reality in the spiritual world. Now read the rest of the passage as he ties this back together with the unanswered question.

[page 130] The evidence of this realization is that no sooner has a question arisen in the heart, than the answer comes as its echo either within or without. If we look in front of ourselves, the answer is before us; if we look behind the answer is behind; if we look up the answer awaits us in the sky; if we look down the answer is engraved on the earth; and if we close our eyes we will find the answer within us. It is like climbing a mountain, a mountain whose name is *Why?* When we have climbed it, then we are face to face with our ideal. It is not study which brings us to this realization; it is reached by rising above all that hinders our faith in truth.

In the center of our eye is a place where all the light signals are conducted to our brain via the optic nerve. In this vortex of all the signals from the distant areas of the retina, no light signals are able to be transmitted, and thus there is a blind spot in each of our eyes. But it is because of this blind spot that we are able to see at all. Khan quotes Nanak as saying, "The grain that takes refuge near the centre of the grinding mill is saved." When we keep close to the center of our grinding mill, we are close to God, and we are in the blind spot through which we can see forever. "Aren't we being foolish if we do not keep constantly in our thoughts the things that can go wrong, the past failings that we must suffer from because of our karmic destiny? How are we to think of destiny and free will?"

[page 142] The best way of believing in destiny is to think that all the disagreeable things we have gone through are part of destiny and belong to the past; to think that we are freed from it. And the best way of looking at free will is to keep in mind that all that is to come, all that is before us, is the outcome of free will. To keep before us as a concentration that nothing wrong will touch us, that all this good for us lies before us.

If you are always looking for answers in the complex, then simple answers will forever elude you. One can see this in medical journals - the new advance is a new drug, a new medical instrument, or a new gene which will block harmful viruses from entering the cell walls. All very complicated, all very expensive, and all hailed as the savior of humankind when they are announced.

[page 149] Man is seeking for phenomena; he wants miracles, communication with ghosts or spirits, he is looking for something complex; and yet the simplest thing and the most valuable thing in life is to find one's true self.

This reminds me of what Rudolf Steiner said about the spiritualists that were prominent at the turn of the 20th Century. They claimed to prove the existence of the spiritual world by communicating with spirits by table-tapping and other materialistic phenomena. The following quotation is from Steiner's book, *Inner Impulses of Evolution* [See ARJ, Volume 1, page 281 for review.]:

[page 73] One gets nowhere if one speaks in general terms of some sort of connection between souls that is distinguishable by the senses. The solution is to be found by thinking of individual threads or streams between all the different souls. We are actually surrounded by a spiritual world just as we are by a physical one.

A century later and one might say that we are still getting nowhere fast - the tsunami of materialistic science has swept away the few remaining vestiges of the knowledge of spiritual connection directly between souls.

In the second half of the 20th Century we heard our popular music change from swing music to rock&roll to rap and zydeco. Here's how Hazrat Inayat Khan describes these three types of music:

[page 158] Intense rhythm produces the devilish quality; moderate rhythm shows the

animal quality; an even rhythm shows the human quality. The form of this rhythm may be described thus: that the human quality is mobile, the animal quality is uneven, and the devilish quality is zigzag.

One of the objections many modern people have to reincarnation is the idea that they might come back as a dog or a monkey. This idea is a misunderstanding due to the taking of a metaphor *literally*. When a Hindu told someone that they would come back as a dog or a monkey, they simply meant that if they didn't straighten up their present life, that in their next life their friends would perceive them as having those specific qualities of a dog or monkey. (Adapted from page 177.)

Where I live mosquitos are a way of life, present in all seasons of the year, both outside and inside our homes. Khan tells us that someone asked the Prophet why mosquitos were created and he said, "That you might not sleep all night, but might devote some hours of the night to your prayers." As one progresses in life one learns that everything that happens to one becomes a source of good, rightly understood.

We may begin life as a machine, but if we progress, we become the engineer of the machine, able to understand its workings and remove former constraints from the machine to allow it to worker better and smoother with fewer problems. One of the constraints that it is possible to remove is that of our karma.

[page 165] Man starts his life as a mechanism, a machine, but he can develop to the stage where he is an engineer. The restriction of Karma is only for the machine. . . . The law of Karma is different for each individual. A thing can be a sin for one person and a virtue for another; it can be right for the one and wrong for the other.

Here we come upon an escape clause to the process of resignation to our karma, a caveat that everyone should keep in mind, as it is so easy to fall into the kind of thinking that Khan warns us of the following example.

[page 165, 166] I have heard a person say, 'I have been ill for so many years, but I have been resigned to it. I bear it easily because it is my Karma, I am paying back.'" By that he may prolong the paying, which was intended perhaps for ten years, for the rest of his life.

What Khan suggests one do is to say, "The past has brought the present, but out of this present I will make the future." Life is an improvisation and at any moment in the music of life we have the ability to introduce a new theme. One technique I recommend to people to assist in this process is the limitation eraser. I suggest that any time they hear themselves stating a limitation that they add the phrase ", up until now" at the end of their statement. The comma is an essential part of the limitation eraser. It acts as a caesura, a pause or break in the music that allows a new theme to begin. During that pause, one should take a deep breath. Used correctly the limitation eraser will open up new possibilities where previously there seemed none. Here's an example of how to use the limitation eraser by saying the following two sentences: I have never used the limitation eraser, < *breathe* . . . > up until now. I will apply it whenever appropriate from now on. See Matherne's [Rule #9](#).

As we progress in life from machine to engineer of the machine, we often find ourselves at cross purposes. What we want to do now, the machine does know how to do or want to do. The machine represents our little ego self, the materialistic portion of our inner self, and the engineer represents the big Ego, the spiritual portion of our inner self, a portion I sometimes refer to as Soul Captain. He is present on the bridge of the ship that I am on, guiding the ship through the waters according to a chart that I don't have access to - I only get to see the scenery that passes the side of the ship and to visit the ports of call that the Soul Captain chooses for me to have an opportunity to visit. If I choose I can stay aboard during certain ports, but darn if we don't keep visiting that same port over and over until finally I go ashore and learn what lessons await me there. Here's how Khan describes this conflict between the ego and Ego:

[page 187] And this constant conflict between his real, spiritual self [Ego] and this self

which hinders his spiritual progress [ego], is pictured in the form of a cross. This cross he carries during his progress. It is the ugly passions, the love of comforts, and the satisfaction in anger and bitterness that he has to fight first; and when he has conquered these the next trouble he has to meet is that still more subtle enemy of himself in his mind; the sensitiveness to what others say, to the opinion of others about himself. . . . This is the crucifixion of that part of a man's being which he has created in himself and which is not his real self, although on the way it always appears that he has crucified his own self.

Khan points out that when Christ said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He was referring directly to being poor in this "self-created spirit" - that is, the little self or ego. Thus, it would be better understood today if we were to say it this way, "Blessed be the one who is empty of ego." To be empty in this way is to become like a reed flute so that the beautiful music of God can resonate and flow through one's body.

[page 190] Rumi has given a beautiful picture of this. He tells why the melody of the reed flute makes such an appeal to our hearts. It is, he says, because first it is cut away from its original stem, and then holes have been made in its heart so that the heart has been broken, and it begins to cry.

In the next passage, Khan shares an insight mirrors that of Rudolf Steiner with his Three-fold Society and Andrew Galambos with his Natural Republic:

[page 200] The best way to understand civilization is the spiritual way. Once a person understands spiritual morality, he does not need to learn man-made morality; it will come by itself. . . . the spiritual life teaches man what is best in conventionality; and when a civilization comes to be built on a spiritual basis, which is bound to happen one day, the conventionality of the world will become genuine and worth having.

In the next passage Khan offers an insight into a phenomena that seems to have gotten more prevalent in recent years with health food fads, herbal supplements, sugar-busters diets, and groups of people opposed to every advance one can imagine - they are opposed to irradiation of meat to preserve it, opposed to bioengineering to improve the disease-resistance and yield of crops, and so on.

[page 249, 250] People say, "I do not like to touch vinegar, it harms my health; I cannot bear to eat cream, I cannot digest it; I cannot stand sugar in my tea, I do not like it." For them these things are poison. By saying such things a person makes certain substances foreign, exclusive, to his nature; and he thereby subjects himself to them. There comes a time when they rule him, when he is in their power.

People are always looking for complicated answers while ignoring the simple answers. To such folk, Khan says they must be given instructions like the following if they ask how to reach spiritual attainment, "Very well; for ten years so around the temple, walk around it a hundred times every evening. And go to the Ganges. Then you will get inspiration." The current fad for walking labyrinths may have stemmed from just such an instruction given to one person and it caught on, like a New Age equivalent of jogging.

Khan warns those who become disappointed in human nature and allow their heart to become cold as follows:

[page 272] Somebody once said to me, "I have lost my friend, and since then I have lost sympathy for human nature." And I said, "Your first loss was not so great, but I pity you for your second loss. It was then that you should have kept your sympathy."

This story gave an example of a person whose heart was sorely out of tune. Khan stresses the salubrious effect of tuning the heart in the following anecdote:

[page 275] Once a lady said to me, "I have had bad luck this week. I lose or break many things; everything tears and gets destroyed." I said, "There is something wrong with your self. You yourself are out of tune; especially this week something has upset your rhythm." And on thinking this over, she found out that it was so.

"Human nature is such that man sees himself last; especially if it comes to blame he never thinks of himself, he first blames the other," Khan says on page 277, and he would have done well to have added the limitation eraser like so, "When it comes to blame, he never thinks of himself, up until now."

The best expression of spirituality next to Hazrat Inayat Khan that I have found has been in Rudolf Steiner's works. Both have an intellectuality that is able to express spirituality in a way that is stripped of the obscure mysticism and obfuscatory occultism that masquerades as true spirituality.

[page 280] However much one studies psychology, theoretically or practically, one will not attain to spirituality. Spirituality does not belong to intellectuality. It has nothing to do with it. In connection with spirituality, intellectuality is only useful in so far as an intellectual person can better express spiritual inspiration.

In the end the Sufi realizes, in the words of Iqbal, that, "I wandered in the pursuit of my own self. I was the traveler, and I am the destination."

