

The International Sufi Movement recently held an online Universal Worship service on the theme of the light of Christ. The scriptures chosen for the service are available on the Inner Call <https://innercall.towardthe1.com/the-light-of-christ-sermon/> The sermon, offered by Pir Nawab Pasnak, follows, slightly revised from the recording for the sake of clarity.



Beloved ones of God,

All of the religions have some tradition of miracles in them and I think that us being able to gather together virtually from all around the globe is a miracle.

I appreciate the people who are staying up late in Australia and the people who have gotten very early in the Western Hemisphere to join the service. At the end of the service, after the blessing, we'll let everybody see each others' screens and you'll have a chance to wave to each other. And that family feeling is very important. That's really what every religious faith tries to teach us, that we are one family, that we belong to each other, and we are all the children of the one Father.

The theme for this service is the light of Christ, and that might seem to weight our thought heavily in the direction of the Christian religion. Well, it's not surprising after all, for we are coming close to the celebration of Christmas. But in fact, the word Christ, although it's completely associated with Jesus – sometimes used as his title, 'the Christ,' and sometimes just as part of his name, as people say, 'Jesus Christ,' – but the word Christ means the anointed one. And there is a long tradition of anointing, meaning putting oil on the body in one way or another, the head or the hands or the feet or the forehead. It was probably done first for health, but also, there used to be a tradition of anointing your guests when they came. In the gospel there is the story about Jesus being anointed by Mary of Bethany who had brought some special oil. In that traditions that was a way of welcoming a guest.

But anointing is also something that marks a kind of consecration, that means a making of or recognition of the sacredness of a person. And in all traditions there have been sacred bearers of light who have come to communicate the divine message to humanity, to the family.

When we look at the scriptures that we have, we can see that very clearly. When reading at the scriptures earlier, I was reminded that in many homes, you can find a table or a shelf or some place where there are photographs of the family, photographs of the parents, the grandparents, the children, the grandchildren, and it's a kind of altar, an altar to the love of the family. And looking at the scriptures for our service today we may think this is really a very beautiful family altar.

The divine presence shows its face in a number of different ways. When we look at the Hindu scripture, for example, in this case there is no human prophet mentioned, and yet the Hindu scripture says what we need to hear, that out of compassion, 'I dwelling in your hearts dispel with the shining lamp of wisdom, the darkness born of ignorance.'

So whenever we have devotion towards a divine ideal, that light will shine in our hearts and it will scatter the ignorance and the darkness. It might make us think of the light in the night when the baby was born in the stable.

In the Buddhist tradition, we have this very beautiful scripture, which makes clear that we don't have to make distinctions and differences. We don't have to argue, saying, is this faith the One or is that faith the One, is this way right or is that way right? The scripture says, 'when the world dissolves,' – that means when duality finishes, then everything becomes clear. Go beyond this way or that way.

In the Zoroastrian scripture, we have a glimpse of a prophet, Zarathustra, who is confronted with a very human situation. On the one hand, he's a limited human being, on the other hand, a prophet giving the divine message. So he says clearly, I know that I am helpless. I am helpless because I've got a scanty herd. He means he has very few cattle, he's not a rich man. He doesn't have many followers. He's just a simple person trying to do the work of the divine presence. But, he says, to whom will the good mind come for inspiration? He says, 'To me, for I am chosen by you for its fulfilment.'

In other words, it's not something that a person proclaims for himself, it's something that the Divine Presence chooses and says, now, here is your task, go and fulfil this – and chooses someone who is completely faithful to the Divine will, and therefore the Divine message is delivered faithfully.

In the Jewish scripture, we have the divine love speaking. 'I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love.' And if we are willing to ask for it, that divine love gives us all that we wish for. Are you hungry? Come, eat. Are you thirsty? Come, drink. You don't have to pay for this gift. It's given. It's given, because the Divine wants to give us more when we are hungry. We think we long for the Divine Presence, we long for that love, but the love longs for us even more.

In the Christian scripture, we also have a glimpse of the two sides, the human and the divine. Jesus is with some disciples, they go up the mountain, and there's a moment of radiance, of complete radiance, and the disciples are totally bewildered. They fall on the ground and hide their faces,

because it's more than they can bear to see this divinity present. And then a moment passes, and Jesus is touching them and saying, don't be afraid. It's all right.

I think we could understand from this that the light of Christ is something that is always integrated in the human being. It's not something that's poured on top. It's not that there's a human being, and suddenly there's a huge amount of light and divine nectar poured on the person, but it's something that we discover within us or the messengers discover within themselves by the help, of course, of the divine presence.

In the scriptures of Islam, the olive tree is 'neither of the east nor of the west and the oil of that olive would almost glow even if untouched by fire.' Oil is the essence. You know when a plant grows, an olive, or from many other plants that grow, if you take away the water of the fruit and you take away the matter, the dense, earth part of the fruit, what you have left is the essence. You have oil and that oil, yes, can nourish us, but it can also give light and for that reason we have the custom of anointing because it is symbolic of receiving the gift and the soothing caress of that divine life that brought us into being in the first place.

'Lit from the oil of a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire.' And then, 'light upon light, God guides to his light who he wills and presents examples for the people. And God is knowing of all things.' Nothing is hidden from God. And if we only surrender to God, the knowledge also is in us. We find it in us.

And finally, in the Gayan, we have these beautiful words of Hazrat and Inayat Khan. 'The image of Christ is in the church.' Yes, he's there. 'The book of Christ is with clergy. The love of Christ is in the heart of his worshiper,' – if we really worship, if it's not just mechanical obedience, but if we really worship, that love is there, but the light of Christ shines not just in Jesus, but through all the illuminated souls. And there have been many, and there are many, and there will be many.

The Vadan says, 'what does it matter if Krishna was Christ, if Brahma was Abraham? One thing is true, that there was, there is, and there always will be, a knower of God, a lover of souls, a server of humanity.'

And I hope that we use this holiday season to share with each other the light that we find in our own heart, and look for the light in the heart of those around us. And thinking of this tradition of gift giving, there's no better gift than our attention to each other. That's what all the presents wrapped up in paper and the ribbon and so on, really say : 'I'm thinking of you. I respect you. I hold you in my heart.'

I hope that we can each do that with those around us and that we can keep that light kindled, not just through the twelve days of Christmas, but all the year to come. That would be the best present that we can give to the world.

Hazrat Inayat Khan said that the real blessing in blessings is to be conscious of the blessings, because there are so many blessings poured upon us, and if we ignore them, if we are not aware of them, we lose the opportunity, but if we can be aware of them, then they make us shine, and we can share them with others.

Thank you.

*May the blessings of God rest upon you;
May God's peace abide with you;
May God's presence illuminate your heart,
Now and forever.*