

## **The Future of Universal Worship**

The International Sufi Movement presented a webinar on May 15<sup>th</sup> asking *What is the future of the Universal Worship?*

We heard from spiritual leaders from other traditions and also from now mature young adults who grew up in Sufi households where Universal Worship was held regularly. Two panel discussions addressed issues raised by the speakers and included questions from the audience.

The panel comprised Pir Nawab Pasnak, Zubin Shore (Activity Secretary for Universal Worship), Darafshan Anda (Secretary for Brotherhood and Sisterhood Activity), and Sabura Allen (Member of the inter-Order Council in Eugene Oregon).

Hazrat Inayat Khan celebrated the first ceremony of the Universal Worship in the hope that followers of different religions might worship together in harmony. The webinar commenced with reference to the first Universal Worship conducted on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1921, in a house in London. There was an acknowledgement that the ceremony was 'divinely inspired'. It is experienced as more than the sum of its parts, from the kindling of the divine light; through the acknowledgement of all the prophets and scriptures that have gone before, and 'all those known and unknown to the world who have held aloft the light of Truth through the darkness of human ignorance; to the final prayer to God, 'the perfection of love, harmony and beauty', residing in the heart of all human beings'

Listening to the experience of others is an important aspect of Unity, and the three spiritual leaders offered inspiring video presentations on broad ranging excerpts from Hazrat Inayat Khan's teachings on the Unity of Religious Ideals. Those excerpts include:

- Although those who have come to awaken humanity are different souls, there is but one spirit in them, and thus all that they have given to humanity is the same in essence.
- That religion which is the need of the human soul, has always been and will always be, - and not understanding that, man has very often revolted against religion.
- Intoxicated in a revolt against religion – man revolts also, ignorantly, against God, or form, or prayer, or anything which asks the deepest of his being. It has become the fashion to be an atheist.
- The outcome of this intoxication is that man is absorbed in material gain, and the spiritual gain and heavenly inspirations are away out of his sight.

Father Jorge Julio Mejía, Minister, Society of Jesus, Columbia; Reverend Helen Summers OAM, Founder and Director, Interfaith Centre of Melbourne; and Rabbi Gabriel Hagai, ordained Master and Lineage holder of the Path of Proximity, France; each gave brief responses.

Only short examples can be included here. All told stories, gave examples from their lives, and emphasised the importance of experience to deepen the belief that the same essence or spirit underlies all religions.

### **Padre Jorge Julio Mejia:**

"We must preserve the unity that can only be realised in the heart, and thanks to the love that arises there, full of mercy, full of understanding and full of unity"

"If we do not keep to the spirit in the texts that inspire the different religious traditions, we will not be able to understand each other, if we do not have in our hearts the possibility of accessing the spirit that all these texts have."

### **Rev Helen Summers OAM:**

"The great spiritual prophets and messengers, taught from their own direct experience of the divine. Their teachings and the examples of their lives show that we too can experience the divine."

"For the spiritual journey, practice is needed, if we want to find water we need to dig a deep well. Our commitment to make time for our spiritual connection, on a daily basis, even when that commitment is not easy, will lead to that divine presence".

**Rabbi Gabriel Hagai:**

“All religions are like instruments of a symphony. In a symphony you have many instruments, and every instrument plays a specific tune, and for the symphony music to arise, to emerge from the players, they all have to play together. And it is exactly like that with religions.

We have all religions, and each religion is like a musical instrument, and you have the Message, which is like a tune, and the thing is that we have to play together. No musical instrument is better than another, no tune is better than another. It would be a reduction, it would be a loss of richness, of music, to play only one tune with all those instruments, or to reduce all the tunes to one instrument. Can you imagine the fifth symphony of Beethoven, played with only one hand on the piano? I mean it’s a loss of beauty.”

Panel discussion and audience questions reflected on the importance of listening to each other to remind ourselves of our essential Unity, the light of the message of the prophets, respect for religious ideals, learning from the written word, from experience, from service to others, the unifying aspects of poetry music and nature. I commend the speaker’s videos and the panel discussion to you.

Three people from South America and two from Australia responded to these questions

- *What was your experience of the Universal Worship growing up?*
- *How has the Universal Worship influenced you?*
- *What impression has Universal Worship had on your life*
- *What is your hope for the future of the Universal Worship?*
- *Are there any special stories or significant memories of Universal Worship you can share?*

**Tala Lopez:** I am a young Ecuadorian Sufi. I am 26 years old, and I received my Sufi name and Sufi blessing when I was 5 years old by Murshid Nawab.

The first time that I saw a Universal Worship ceremony it was in my first Sufi retreat, and for me the most important message that I received from the ceremony is that God’s light, God’s essence is present in every awakened heart. And also that there are many ways to know and to find God, through different sacred books, through different religions or paths and through different messengers.

For the future I hope that the Universal Worship ceremony continues, bringing so much blessing and love and unity for this world that desperately needs it.

**Taviz Lopez Puyol:** Hello, I’m the daughter of Wali and Mujira, and the sister of Tala and Sita.

I’m from Quito Ecuador but I have been living in France since 2011.

Universal Worship transmitted to me the idea of unity, of beauty, and this ability to find beauty in texts that could sometimes be contradictory or problematic at certain levels. It represented for me a moment when a common message could appear, overcoming the distinctions and differences that divide.

And concerning my hope for the future of the Universal Worship, I hope that the message it carries will continue to spread and that the flame will continue to ignite hearts around the world.

**Vadan Betancur Gomez:** I live in Tabio, Colombia A village where life goes on without drastic changes Still nowadays we find our inner search moves most intensely.

I remember my father’s words when I asked him about birth and death. He shared his view with me, without imposing it on me. He told me ‘we all come from a divine, supremely abundant and generous light.

As we are descending from there we take all the gifts, all the talents that we can, from that divine light.

Then we arrive at life with a mission of sharing and expressing with others, those qualities that are hidden in our limited body.

Now I see the Universal Worship as the re-enactment of the source and destiny from which we all come

And in which we participate beyond all the differences.

### **Yollana Shirin Shore.**

I remember many, many Universal Worship services that were just a natural part of the environment of my upbringing. So for me to speak about the Universal Worship service now, it's really thinking about what was is the impact to have that message of the Unity of Religious Ideals as something like the air that you breathe, something that you take for granted in the formation of yourself as a person, For me I can say I'm very grateful to have had that message as a part of my growing up. I think its a beautiful and powerful practice.

### **Padraig Kabir Parkhurst**

To grow up in Sufism, was to me to be immersed in music and poetry, especially that of other cultures. In our house there were sacred spaces, sacred because we treated them as such, and sacred texts. A little of the sacredness has brushed off on to music and poetry more generally. The prayers of the Universal Worship service felt like incantations, whose rhythms and intonations must be respected, along with the words themselves. This familiarization with religion that the Universal Worship service provided, has instead, instilled a lifelong respect of both religious and cultural traditions which I hope to one day pass on to my children.

**Pir Nawab Pasnak:** I found these messages very moving. For me it makes Universal Worship living, it's not just a concept. It's something that has touched lives, and if it is living we hope that it will grow further.

(Closing comments) I feel like we've only just begun. We titled this the Future of the Universal Worship. That's more an open question than something we expected to find answers for.

We've been blessed – it's a privilege to be recipients of this stream of inspiration, and in whatever way we can, to pass it on to others. We've seen that we are not so far from active practitioners in other established streams, and we are sort of on course for finding Unity.

We've also seen that our sufi children, who are now older than I was when I discovered Sufism, have inhaled this, and it feels normal for them, and that to me is so deeply moving, and gives so much hope for the future, whatever the future may be. No doubt there is still a lot to talk about in practical terms.

I'm grateful to all of our video participants,

Padre Jorge Mejia, Reverend Helen Summers OAM, and Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï.

I'm grateful for the views of the five young Sufis: Tala Lopez, Taviz Lopez Puyol, Vadan Betancur Gomez, Yollana Shirin Shore and Padraig Kabir Parkhurst.

I'm grateful to the panelists, and to Zubin and Shirin for their effort on this webinar, and finally

I'm grateful to the people who logged in to see what this was and most of you stayed to the end.

Thank you

All of the speakers blessed the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the first Universal Worship,

I will include Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï's words here:

And may God Bless this 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first Universal Worship Ceremony. May God Bless you all.

May you continue to enlighten the world with the Light of Spirituality, and the Light of Love and the love of goodness, and loving kindness and compassion, the light of Wisdom.

May we all worship God together, and elevate the consciousness of humanity to its real divine potential, that we may attain one day, Inshallah, by the will of God.

May the blessings of god be upon you all, Thankyou