

## **What is the Future of Universal Worship? Transcript of Webinar 15<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

### **Introduction:**

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 first Universal Worship was conducted on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1921, in a house in London. The ceremony was ‘divinely inspired’ and is frequently experienced as ‘more than the sum of its parts’, from kindling of the divine light, through the acknowledgement of 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.’

We will hear from leaders of other traditions and also from young adults who grew up in households where the Universal Worship was held regularly. Panel discussions after each section will address issues raised by speakers and invite questions from the audience.

### **The panel:**

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

### **The speakers:**

Padre Jorge Julio Mejia, Minister, Society of Jesus, Colombia;  
Reverend Helen Summers OAM, Founder and Director, Interfaith Centre of Melbourne; and  
Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï, Rabbi, ordained Master and Initiator in a mystical Jewish Sephardi tradition.

### **The speakers who grew up with Universal Worship:**

Tala Lopez, Taviz Lopez Puyol, Vadan Betancur Gomez, Yollana Shirin Shore, Pdraig Kabir Parkhurst.

Speakers offered short videos responding to this text from Hazrat Inayat Khan on the Unity of Religious Ideals.

Those who have come at different times to the world to enlighten humanity and to awaken souls from their sleep of ignorance, have come from one and the same source. And although they are different souls there is but one spirit in them and thus all that they have given to humanity is the same in essence. By studying the scriptures deeply and with sympathy, not only intellectually, one will find in Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, in all these religions which have been followed by millions for ages, that in spite of having different outer forms, they all have one and the same inner sense. The inner teachings of Buddha are the same as the teachings of Krishna, although their followers may deny it. And so will the others; each one will say that the faith of the other is different from his own. This separation has always existed and still exists. It can only be removed by the understanding of the essence that is to be found in all religions.

Religion has its place in the world, whatever be the condition. From the beginning of civilization there has been some religion or other followed by people. Of course, whenever a new religion came, the old religion was rooted out, but what was rooted out? Was it the religion or the corruption that was rooted out? The truth is the

truth, religion is religion. The religion can never be rooted out. That religion which is the need of the human soul, that religion has always been and will always be. It is only the outer form, its outer dogmas, which have perhaps been corrupted at times, which did not answer the purpose of humanity at that stage of evolution. And not understanding that, man has very often revolted against religion, not knowing that it the revolt was against corruption, not against religion.

Now the condition of the world as we find it today, it is like an intoxication. People do not know, when they are in revolt, whether they do right or wrong. When a person is cross with his friend, by seeing the defects or the faults of the friend, he forgets his merits. Therefore man today, intoxicated in a revolt against religion – which means against corruption – revolts also, ignorantly, against God, or form, or prayer, or anything which asks the deepest of his being. And what has this revolt brought about in the Western world just now? It has brought about a condition where it has become the fashion to be an atheist.

There are people who wish to mention the name of God, and yet they are afraid whether it will be held against the fashion, the custom of the day. It is just as in the past – an atheist in the past did not dare to say that he did not believe; he had to respect the custom. The outcome of this condition is that man is absorbed in material gain, and the spiritual gain and heavenly inspirations are away out of his sight.

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**Jorge Julio Mejia S.J.** Minister, Society of Jesus, Colombia;

[Notes on my life. I was born in the sixth month of 1937. The journey reaches 83 years.

My kind, elderly grandmother invited me to discover the profound presence and transforming action of the one who is "more intimate than the most intimate part of myself". A long and sometimes painful journey: at first I interpreted it as obedience to what was commanded and what was learned in my mind. There were some 16 years of academic life. One day I was confronted with the unacceptable and the incomprehensible. I was defeated. I did not know what to do with the cancer of a newborn nephew. Not a word of comfort possible for his parents. It was total darkness. Little by little I discovered that stillness, silence and deep breathing were tuning on the light and strengthening my soul. I felt immersed in a sea of love and wisdom. And how to climb to the summit of transcendental awareness. An arduous journey, constant, and guided by Master Jesus. And here I am: I am learning to love and serve all my sisters and brothers. Erasing the indifference. Jorge Julio Mejía M., S.J.]

Cordial greetings.

In a little book, Father Anthony de Mello tells of a mystic who returned from the desert, and his disciples begged him to tell them what the experience was like.

The mystic told them: go to the desert and live the experience yourselves.

But they were so insistent that he told them in vague words, hoping to motivate them to go and live the experience. The disciples took notes of what the master said, but none of them went to the desert; they collected the notes, wrote a book and then began to study it, and went to remote countries to preach it. This is one of the examples in which we can find the difference in the writings – let's say 'sacred' in inverted commas – applying a maxim of St. Paul, which says: "The letter kills, only the spirit unites".

I believe that, while it is the spirit, of which all inspiration makes human beings better, linking them in a deeper way with divinity, it is from the rational and written versions that there are now many differences. The risk we run is that, the spirit that inspires all men and women who have an inspiration in an experience in their heart, that when it becomes written, suddenly, the writing risks losing the spirit, because it will be at that moment that we will find the differences, we will find the oppositions, we will break the unity.

This is what I read in the text I was asked about, as it is: 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 in the exegesis we make of the sacred texts, of the letter – if we do not have in our hearts the possibility of accessing the spirit that all these texts have.

I lived an experience promoted by the World Council of Churches, of bodies that worked in the social field and were from different Christian traditions. We were going to carry out an ecumenical experiment, which was not theological, which was not rational, and we set as our motto: To love and serve the poorest.

And in serving the poorest of our neighbours we found that we had one soul, we had one heart; in service we served each other, we felt we were one community and our unity was a marvellous service.

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.

Be well!

Cordial saludo.

En un pequeño libro, el 'Padre Anthony de Mello' narra que un místico regresó del desierto y sus discípulos le rogaron que les contara cómo había sido esa experiencia.

El místico les dijo: vayan ustedes al desierto y vivan la experiencia ustedes mismos.

Pero ellos insistieron tanto, que él con la ilusión de motivarlos para que fueran a vivir la experiencia, con palabras imprecisas les contó.

Los discípulos tomaron nota de lo que dijo el maestro, pero ninguno fue al desierto, recogieron las notas, escribieron un libro y luego se pusieron a estudiarlo y fueron a países remotos a predicarlo. Este es uno de los ejemplos en los cuales podemos encontrar la diferencia que hay en los escritos, digamos entre comillas 'sagrados', aplicando una máxima que tiene San Pablo, que dice: "La letra mata, solo el espíritu une".

Creo que, aunque el espíritu del cual toda inspiración que hace mejor al ser humano vinculándolo de modo más profundo con la divinidad, es esa versión racional y escrita según la cual, hay ya muchas diferencias. El riesgo que corremos es que, el espíritu que inspira a todos los hombres y mujeres que tienen una inspiración en una experiencia en su corazón, es que cuando se vuelve letra, de repente, el escrito tiene el riesgo de perder el espíritu porque será en ese momento, en el que vamos a encontrar las diferencias, vamos a encontrar las oposiciones, vamos a romper la unidad.

Es lo que yo leo en el escrito sobre el que me han preguntado, tal cual; si no nos atenemos al espíritu en los textos que inspiran las diferentes tradiciones religiosas, no vamos a podernos comprender en las exegesis que le hagamos a los textos sagrados, a la letra, sino tenemos en el corazón la posibilidad de acceder al espíritu que todos esos textos tienen.

Yo viví una experiencia promovida por el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias, de entidades que trabajaban en lo social y eran de diferentes tradiciones cristianas. Íbamos a realizar una experiencia ecuménica, que no fuera teológica, que no fuera racional y pusimos como lema: Amar y servir a los más pobres.

Y en el servicio al prójimo más pobre encontramos que teníamos una sola alma, teníamos un solo corazón; en el servicio nos servimos, nos sentimos una sola comunidad y nuestra unidad fue un servicio maravilloso.

Hay que conservar la unidad que solo se puede realizar en el corazón, y gracias al amor que allí surge lleno de misericordia, lleno de comprensión y lleno de unidad.

¡Que estén muy bien;

**Rev Helen Summers OAM**, Founder and Director, Interfaith Centre of Melbourne.

Good evening, I'm Helen Summers, and I'm very honored to be invited this evening, especially for the celebration of 100 years of Universal Worship. Hazrat Inayat Khan acknowledged that the prophets and messengers who have come through the ages, to enlighten humanity, have come from the same divine source, which is represented by the light of the main candle in Universal Worship.

These 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 and be a light bearer for others, by living the values such as love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, right conduct and selfless service.

As Interfaith ministers we attempt to live these values, and to love all and serve all, in unity and diversity. During the lockdown in Melbourne last year, we delivered meals to people in need, we answered many phone calls from people needing assistance. We gave comfort and practical help where possible and we held inter-spiritual gatherings. Many people were searching for more meaning in their lives and needing some direction, and this we view as love in action.

Our interfaith ceremonies are sometimes held in public places, and then I invite representatives from each faith to offer a prayer or a reading appropriate to the theme or purpose of the event, and this shows how in each tradition, different words are used to describe the divine presence.

We always include music or chants, and these are universal in leading us to that divine presence. In over twenty years of interfaith ministry I have found that the arts, poetry, visual arts, and music speak to people at a deep level, especially sacred music. The arts transcend time and they unite us. Music especially expresses the universal yearning that is shared by people all over the planet. During these difficult times of human health and planetary health, we can connect virtually and deeply, through music and song, spreading harmony from many traditions, and bringing joy to our souls, and strengthening our spirits.

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. And we all have difficulty at times in making that time.

May Universal Worship continue into the second century, communicating the divine essence, for those who are searching. Thank you

**Rabbi Gabriel Hagi**, Rabbi, ordained Master and Initiator in a mystical Jewish Sephardi tradition. Shalom Aleichem. May peace, the mercy of God, and His blessings be upon us all.

My name is Rabbi Gabriel Hagi, and I'm making this video for the memory of Hazrat Inayat Khan This great Sufi saint that came from India to Europe and taught the innermost essence of spirituality, of his spirituality, which is the innermost essence of all spiritualities.

Meaning that all religions have an inner and an outer.

The outer, I call it the literal, the literal, I call it the letter.

And they have an inner most core teaching, core Light, which is the Spirit.

Most people in religions tend to be between the letter and the Spirit.

But Inayat Khan was in the Spirit of the religion, and this is also my tradition.

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.

As it's the same with spirituality. All spirituality embodies the Light of the One, the light of God, and this embodiment takes different forms according to where it happened, in history, and in time, and in geography.

And of course all people are not the same. We don't speak the same language. We don't have the same cultural backgrounds, we don't have the same history, and because of that the revelation of the one, of the unique(ness) of God, may take different forms, but the innermost teaching, the innermost spirituality of all religions is the same.

That was the teaching of Hazrat Inayat Khan and I was very pleased to discover that every mystic, all the mystics in the world, we share the same faith. It is that everything is One, the Message is One, and the form/s that it takes may be different. So that is the message I wanted to share with you.

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. So that's what I wanted to say today. May the blessings of god be upon you all, Thankyou

### **The Future of Universal Worship Panel 1.**

#### **Pir Nawab Pasnak**

Heartfelt thanks to everyone who has attended.

Heartfelt thanks to these three practitioners, Padre Jorge Julio Mejia, Reverend Helen Summers OAM, and Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï, who have taken time from their busy lives to make something for us, and for giving us insight from their point of view.

When we started working on this event it seemed appropriate that we would have input from people working in a specific religious tradition. And so we asked these people and I'm very grateful for what they've contributed to us. Each gave their own understanding of Unity, how it works in their community. Although in such a short video, you can't really see how they are working, it gives a taste.

After this conversation we have input from people who have grown up in Universal Worship, because that's also a place where we can look for some understanding of what the Universal Worship has accomplished so far, and where it might need to go in future.

They are my opening thoughts, and of course, I'm also grateful to my fellow panelists.

**Sabura Allen.** Thank you Nawab. What I'd like to start with is that all three individuals that we were fortunate enough to hear, talked about the essence, Unity, in different ways. I'd like to ask the panelists to talk to the idea that there is the essence, Unity, the Spirit, the Truth underlying all religions that are being shown in the Universal Worship. Would you like to respond to that?

**Darafshan Anda.** Yes thank you. I think the three interventions from the spiritual leaders have been very inspiring. It is beautiful to see what the Universal Worship is about when we look at people from different traditions, talking about the same topic and reflecting on the text of Hazrat Inayat Khan, about the idea of religions being the surface of the innermost essence brought by the Messengers. I think there are a couple of points they share in their views; one is the idea of service, service coming from the aspect of uniting. Regardless of what tradition you have, the action of service that comes from love, reflects that religion in that you are working for others, and recognizing in others that the same essence is in everybody.

Hazrat Inayat Khan says 'There is one religion, the religion of the heart', which is what these spiritual leaders are saying is the innermost of religion. This love that is flowing from the heart is what unites us all. One sentence from Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï which, I think says it all, is 'Let's worship all together.' I think religions are teaching us to worship God. If we can all worship together it's because we are based on that essence that is the love that we can all feel and express in service and in the recognition of the same spirit in everybody.

**Sabura Allen:** Thankyou. It was really beautiful to hear Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï describe that all mystics when they get together and they know each other, realize that they share the same faith. The other thing that really struck me is that some of our speakers talked about the letter of the law, of the religion, versus the spirit of religion.- They were talking about what was literal, and this is another way that people have come trying to find this essence. We have the wonderful story of Padre Mejia where he said the teacher comes back from retreat in the desert, and says ‘I’ve gone there and had this wonderful experience’. His students say, ‘Tell us about it, and we’ll write it down and talk about it later, and we’ll study your notes.’  
These three leaders have talked about being involved in the experience.

**Zubin Shore:** The thing that struck me about what Padre Jorge said about the letter, is that he makes it so clear that ‘we must preserve the Unity that can only be realized in the heart, and thanks to the love that arises there, full of mercy and compassion and understanding’, we can get on with our purpose.  
I felt it’s such a profound and beautiful statement.

I do know that when some very gifted authors have written, their work has been healing because it has included, in fact its true of Hazrat Inayat Khan’s writing too, it has included the life spirit of what they have to say. That underlying Unity is a great power. Now there is a lot of consumption of books that actually aren’t doing anything, the life is not in them.

I am interested when Reverend Helen Summers talks about the art that unites us. That is another area where the poet taps the depth of their soul and it is uncontestable, we can’t argue about it, we recognize the Truth. And Murshid said about the readings of the great teachers/Messengers, they appear very simple, but when we contemplate them, they can reveal the mountain of Truth beneath them.

**Sabura Allen:** Thank you. Nawab, Will you speak to Respect in the traditions?

**Pir Nawab Psnak:** There is something very interesting if you think about what our three guests have said. Padre Jorge came to say “It’s all about love- there is only one heart – only one soul, there are not many hearts and many souls.”

Reverend Helen Summers, among the various points she made, did talk about the beauty of music uniting people; and so we have love, we have beauty.

Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï said “with the different instruments playing different music, we need to have harmony.”  
So we have Love, Harmony and Beauty from our three guests.

There are two faces of respect, one is a kind of mechanical observation, which isn’t very successful, usually. Real respect comes when we recognize that we are not separate from the other person. We recognize that they and we are one – and when we can feel that, then we start the journey to say – “Well, there is someone who worships in a different way from what I know, but they must be doing it sincerely, and so let’s try to understand where it comes from, and what is being expressed in their way. In that way we could learn to live together very nicely I think.

**Sabura Allen:** Thankyou, that brings me to talking about what happens when people have their experience in different religions. All of the individuals who talked about the importance of direct experience, experience of the divine essence, in that working together, people of different religions find the Unity. Can you talk to the importance of experience, and what that actually means?

**Darafshan Anda:** Yes I hope everyone could hear or read the story that Padre Jorge told of the experience that the mystic Anthony de Mello told, and the students who wanted to learn from it. The mystic will tell them – “Go and experience it for yourself. Try to feel it.” I think it is because this love, to which he refers afterwards, this kindness and compassion, cannot be taught by words. If you don’t feel it you won’t be able to understand what it is if someone explains it to you. It is like a child, a baby, a small child, you cannot describe to it how to walk, or tell it how to take a spoon to its mouth. The child doesn’t have the words for it; and we probably don’t even know the words of the heart for someone to tell us how to love. It is experiencing it, it is feeling that glow, that energy, that light, that’s why I think they refer to the innermost, or to the essence of that. Zubin has already

told us something about the letter. A poet writes when they touch the depth of their soul, and from there they write because they are not transmitting something someone else tells them, but probably it is from the Truth. Truth can only be lived and experienced and cannot be shared by words.

I think this is related to the Universal Worship, because the altar form, the external part of religion, of worshipping can be different, because we are all different. I think Rabbi Gabriel Hagaï also mentioned this. We are all different, our shapes, our customs, our culture, everything is different, and respecting is accepting their difference.

What unites us all is what we do share, which is that Spirit, that Truth, that Love within us.

That, I think, is what the Universal Worship is trying to show, that we are sharing that essence. Different Masters brought that message to us in different forms so that we could somehow perceive it and accept it.

**Sabura Allen:** Thankyou. I think that Universal Worship has made us more comfortable with the words, with the letter. Sometimes when you feel more comfortable about another tradition you can find your way to the Truth. We have a question. As there is Universal Worship, what examples are there that go beyond words? How does the universal language of the spiritual message exist without words? We had some speakers talk about music, and the symphony, but what's your take on that question?

**Zubin Shore:** I came to Universal Worship because I spent time in my teacher's study, where there was a Universal Worship altar. After a few visits I commented "This is a very beautiful altar." He thought 'Well I think you might be a Cheraga one day.' That was a very different state to when I came to light the lights. In fact first I polished the brass candlesticks before I learnt to kindle the lights, and I really loved that job – I thought it was the best job in the world. I cannot tell you the experience of making those brass candlesticks shine. Over a very long time the experience of the light in Universal Worship has become the primary thing. Even though I learnt to prepare the readings and - I'm still learning to give the talk. In a complete Universal Worship service the effect of the light coming through the Divine Light candle and through all the prophets and remaining, and remaining after the blessing, and after 45 minutes people are still sitting there, no words – this ineffable, wordless light. I can't write about that because it is an experience that you have to have.

**Darafshan Anda:** May I add something to Vadan's question about a wordless language for a spiritual message? I think it also relates to this idea 'There is only one sacred book, that is nature.' Nature would be that wordless message telling us all these teachings from the spirit.

**Sabura Allen:** Thank you. There is one question that I would like to leave with Nawab. 'Can you tell us a little bit about the original inspiration for Universal Worship that Hazrat Inayat Khan received?

**Pir Nawab Psnak:** Thankyou Sabura. We don't know precisely what his inspiration was. A mystic doesn't usually talk about that kind of thing anyway, but we know that he had the inspiration, the form and the service that had these different rays of light combined on it. I think in a way this answers the earlier question that came from Vadan. There is a wordless effect when the Universal Worship service is alive. The vibration is there, that light is there, it touches people, it does something inwardly. Of course we use the vehicle of words, we can't avoid it, and we use the vehicle of form, we can't avoid it, we light this candle, and this candle, and yet the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Putting all the candles and all the books together doesn't add up to what really happens when there is a real live Universal Worship sermon. And so Murshid had his experience and he worked in various ways and forms with his mureeds until they had something that was there. Precisely how he perceived it or how the vision came to him we don't know.

**Sabura Allen:** Thank you very much.

People who grew up with Universal Worship prepared short videos responding 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**

Hi My name is Tala, 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 me that was a very important message (to receive) in such a young age.

Also for me it was the liberty to know god in different ways and to respect and honor different ways through the ceremony. Also it was very important to me to realize that if you can really listen to the sacred message in different books about god, and you really listen without ego, without prejudice, you can find, you can hear the message of God.

Also is the message of Unity of Love and respect that the ceremony symbolizes that has been really important to me through my personal life also, but it has been the (touch)stone of my commitment to the Sufi message to be able to recognize God in the others' eyes.

The Universal Worship ceremony has influenced me by giving me the opportunity to expand my vision, or my perception of God, by different versions of God. I find myself believing and respecting all the different messengers that the Universal Worship ceremony honors. I believe their sacred words, and I pray to them, and I think I have received different blessings from them during my life.

For me, the most important is the message of unity that is carried into the sufi message. I feel incredibly blessed to have grown my life in the Sufi Movement and I have all these wonderful impressions and memories. I have heard incredible speeches about love, about forgiveness, about respect of other movements and other paths and the seeking of Unity impressed me most.

One of my important memories of the Universal Worship ceremony was in a sufi kids retreat that we had in Cuenca. Where my sister Tavis was in charge of giving the discourse during the ceremony, and she was like a mini cheraga, at that time. Murshid Nawab had chosen the topic of love for that ceremony.

Taviz was about 13 so she didn't know much about love, but she was an expert about God's love and she talked about love being infinite, and she talked about the purity of the emotion of love in those who can awake their heart, and how love is the reminder of the ultimate purpose of finding God, that is the eternal unity.

For me that was a very beautiful and important moment in my life, but also for me it was the moment that I understood the purpose of the ceremony.

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 my name is Emily and my Sufi name is Taviz,

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.

For me Universal Worship was part of my childhood, with my sister Tala and a group of other children and teenagers. Through my father we were in contact with Sufism and naturally attended Sufi activities like the Universal Worship.



I believe that it allowed me from a very early age to value the multiple messages and not to categorize religion in a Catholic country like Ecuador. This gave me a particularly enriching freedom, and gave me the impression of knowing persons with different beliefs, even if it was not necessarily the case.

I believe the Universal Worship was one of my first concrete experiences of respect, and I think it is something that has been with me since I was a child. Although I can't always apply it, and it's a difficult task for me in this world that generates so much suffering.

Universal Worship was one of my first reminders and invitations to seek beauty. It 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.

In Ecuador we were very lucky to have a Sufi group of children and teenagers and we were very lucky to have specific times with Nawab. So for example when I was around 16 we had a children's retreat in Cuenca. And Nawab asked me to do the sermon for the Universal Worship that was to mark the beginning of the Adults' retreat. The theme was love. I think it was one of the most challenging tasks I have ever faced, and the night before, for a little while, I thought about running away. But then as often happens in sufism, something bigger than me flowed and I was able to write and to give the sermon. I've never been able to see the video of that Universal Worship, but it was something that marked me and I kept a powerful and loving memory of that retreat.

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**

My name is Vadan I live in Tabio, Colombia. A village where life goes on without drastic changes Still nowadays we find our inner search moves most intensely.

Columbia has been traditionally a Catholic country. When someone feels interested in other spiritual streams, still nowadays they must deal with some relatives who worry about it. They will be treated like a black sheep.

My parents grew up in this conservative Catholic environment but they respected our decisions in the spiritual path.

I remember my father 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. We could debate the talents that we came with, and with all those limitations, to give back at the end of the path, what we made with it.

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.

A year ago, attending a Universal Worship at my father's funeral, I felt anxious when suddenly the candle faded out. But now I think there is nothing to worry about, Light is everywhere, always with us, always within us.

My memory, the first image I have of sufism, is Nawab smiling, talking to a small group, in a small room, My father Amin sat next to him to translate his words for us. When he finished a sentence he turned to my father and listened very carefully. I feel joy when I remember the smiles they exchanged in the communion of the message. At that time Nawab didn't speak Spanish as he does now, and only a few of us were fluent in English, but there was a common language. Nawab's words reached us with a feeling, that the translation, later, only confirmed.

Something connected, otherwise beyond language, beyond the borders and the differences. Later came the annual retreats, the weekly meetings in each city and the solitary practices. But this meeting of gazes, this language shared beyond the differences, is an ever present image of the universal message of sufism in my life. Thank you very much

## **Yollana Shirin Shore**

Hello my name is Yollana. In the sufi community I am sometimes known as Shirin.

I wanted to make this video on Universal Worship.

I have a particular experience of this from being the daughter of Zubin, and she came to sufism the year after I was born, when she met Murshid Sharif Jansen.

I was never pushed to be involved in sufism but it was always happening around me in my growing up.

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 of having 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. The service itself, the altar with the seven candles and the seven books, each one representing the traditions, even though I recognise that not all the wisdom traditions are honored. Still, at the essence of each one is the same message.

I feel that the concept is encapsulated, embodied and shared through the Universal Worship service itself in a quite powerful way. As I said, for me that symbolism really landed deeply in me, in such a way that it just felt normal and obvious. I think that if Hazrat Inayat Khan were around today, he'd be happy to hear that there are children who have grown up and their parents were doing this practice, and because of that those children were to take it for granted, that this message is the case.

So that is my thoughts on the Universal Worship, I think it is a beautiful and powerful practice. Practitioners today should not be afraid to bring the message to the local context of their community, the people that they are practicing with. As Hazrat Inayat Khan said, each teacher has brought to the world their own message, and the same message in a different form. And as we come to know the spirit of the Universal Worship, we should also each bring that message into our lives in our own way, and in our own practice.

So that's my thoughts.

## **Padraig Kabir Parkhurst**

When I was first asked to do this, I wasn't sure what I could say without feeling a hypocrite.

I've long felt that sufism and the title sufi isn't something to be spoken of lightly. A title to be earned rather than used.

With that disclaimer I will say that I grew up feeling a part of the international sufi movement and still feel a closeness to the teachings of Inayati Sufism, and the Chistis more broadly.

My parents became initiated when I was 1 year old, so as much as anyone in the west can be, I grew up surrounded by sufism. 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. Each week, or close to, we would gather in the worship room to perform a service, following which we would have fresh tea and biscuits.

While sometimes the readings from the service would be planned, more often than not they would be chosen at random. Pick a page and see where your eyes fell. I preferred this latter method, as the themes that emerged from it felt more organic. It was only later that I found out that this method is still used in Iran today to seek guidance from the writings of Hafiz and Rumi. But it was in this way that glances of the bits of the scriptures that aren't usually drawn on, became visible. This going beyond the handful of passages that are usually referred to, led me to read some of these works from cover to cover, such as the Dharmapada, the Bhagavadgita and the Koran. Its been said that reading the bible from cover to cover is a recipe for atheism. Thus far however, I have not found that to be the case. 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.

## **The Future of Universal Worship Panel 2**

**Pir Nawab Pasmak:** 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.

**Sabura Allen:** I really enjoyed seeing the videos of these young individuals who have grown up in the Sufi Movement and who have grown up with Universal Worship. It really does speak to the difference of their coming. I came as an adult, becoming a Cheraga, and putting different texts up and searching to find the Unity in the Message. These children just show up and become involved and they have such an open heart. I think the lovely story of just opening the volumes and picking whatever was seen, is something that I don't think that I would do as an adult, but it allowed him as a young person to become comfortable with the words and to go into the Koran, and to go into all these different scriptures and go forward and read them.

I think that's such a lovely blessing that these people have given us, in thinking about the Universal Worship of the future. So Hazrat Inayat Khan started with his divine inspiration, its been going for 100 years, and its bearing fruit and will continue to bear fruit. These young people have brought to light how some of that fruit has turned out in an openness and a love for the tradition, and a willingness to be open to the Unity of all.

**Darafshan Anda:** Very similarly I think these videos have shown us growing up in an environment of tolerance and respect for other religions, more so in Universal Worship where you not only show respect and tolerance, but you try to put together different messages showing that there is Unity in them. This has resulted in these young adults taking for granted that every single Messenger had something to add to this symphony that Rabbi Gabriel Hagai was telling us of. When you are raised like that you don't even doubt the respect that they all should have. It's nice to see how they, if maybe not practicing as a Sufi, are practicing it in their lives by not judging, not discriminating, not making differences, and I think that's the message. Thank you.

**Pir Nawab Pasmak:** (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 Hagai.

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