

# What does the soul tell?

*An exploration*

Reflections on teachings  
of Hazrat Inayat Khan  
on the sphere of the soul  
in mind and heart

Discovering dimensions  
in one's life energy

*A Sufi essay*

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## INTRODUCTION

# Soul and consciousness

The soul – our very self, yet so little known. Nevertheless, it constitutes one's light and life, its energy. A shining ray of the divine sun, my origin, my end. So little known, why? Because it escapes understanding in the realm of the mind. It escapes sensing in terms of the realm of emotion. A shining light – is it visible? Not by the eyes. Likewise in its purity and fullness it is perceived neither in the categories of the mind nor of those of the heart. Yet it does shine through the mind and through the heart. Then and there understood as enlightened mind, as enlightened heart. Because the soul's light needs an instrument in order that one can perceive it. On the one hand mind and heart function as instruments whilst on the other hand they are a cover, a cover of many layers – the veils of body, mind and even heart. Instruments of the soul to experience life to its full. And at the same time this veil of the mind is misleading me in telling that I am my mind, that's why I am – cogito ergo sum: 'I am my mind.' The veil of the body telling 'I am my body.' The veil of the heart telling 'my feeling, my emotion, that's me.' Therefore, who is the soul?

## A SHORT DIALOGUE

'The soul is one's very being,' Hazrat Inayat Khan tells. 'That is important,' the seeker on the path will respond. And she may take the book *The soul whence and whither* and study it. 'What a wonderful issue. But is it real?' She is moved by the images of angels and djinns the soul is meeting on its journey to earth in order to be born a human being. What an exciting trip through such beautiful landscapes. And her supposed partner wonders 'is this is also my past history – about worlds one does not even

remember'. Yes, she asks, 'what then is my very being, and how to find it? How do these miraculous worlds over there correspond to the rational, material and sensory conditions here? He in reply continues, 'I recognize myself as a body, the body is my body, and I experience it from moment to moment – in all its desires, with all its senses'. She adds, 'and I recognize myself as a feeling heart, likewise as a thinking mind'. 'Is all this then that very being?' he asks. 'How can that be as it suffers from limitations, from it being temporary? It does not feel like'. It is quite an issue as we will learn that the soul does not think, and does not feel. And yet! We will follow Hazrat Inayat's words as directed to us.<sup>1</sup>

How then does one experience the soul, in what way does soul speak? That is the issue this essay is addressing. The soul is a radiant ray of the divine sun, Inayat Khan tells, and its experience is pure light, pure vibration, pure energy – experience as well as expression. As a human being one wonders, do we avail of an instrument by which the soul can tell us? Neither body nor mind nor heart seem to suffice. Yet, many will testify to have perceived a glimpse of that light, some sort of vibration, an energy that is immaterial and lifting. A real experience, beyond imagination and fantasy. Philosophically this is a riddle. How can the I experience itself? Is it the heart, the mind, the body?

The clue is this. Body, mind and heart constitute a gift, a gift one has received in order for the soul to experience life on all levels of consciousness. They constitute the instruments of one's soul.

The soul's development is sketched as a grand journey of the soul itself, originating in the sphere of light, the divine sun, sojourning first in the angelic and then in the sphere of the mind-beyond

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1 The main body of texts on the soul is found in the principal work of the Master on this subject. It is *The soul, whence and whither*, the well-known book that contains the series of lectures held in the Summer School of 1923. The contents have been affirmed time and again in later lectures, as can be found in, for example, *The Complete Works*, 1926 II (see Appendix A). Another major text is *Metaphysics*.

(the djinn sphere<sup>2</sup>). Finally the soul becomes a human being on the earth plane, consisting of the instruments of body, mind and heart, in order to live life and experience it to the full, enlivened and kept together by the life energy of the soul. The book then relates the return journey of the soul. This in a nutshell is what Inayat Khan has sketched on this subject.

Therefore, body, mind and heart are the instruments for the soul, vehicles to transport it through the successive states of consciousness. Vehicles to experience life on earth, in this world.

How, and to what extent?

- Consciousness of light in the soul's own sphere, of peace, stillness.
- Consciousness of love, harmony and beauty in the sphere of the heart.
- Consciousness of clarity, creativity and inspiration in the sphere of the mind.
- Consciousness of all these in the spiritual energy of one's actual life, working in the body, in one's thinking, in one's feeling, in one's silence.
- Each of these as a specific language of the soul.

Qualities which we will encounter throughout the essay.

Hazrat Inayat Khan thus describes in images the soul's journey through these states before its birth on the earthly plane. But, he adds, it is not a journey of the soul. Rather it is a journey of consciousness.

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2 The term djinn, in Western culture, is associated with fairy-tale-like figures, often of malignant nature, opposed to man rather than being her spiritual counterpart. Therefore, preference is given to the term 'the mind-beyond' – though being well aware that this is an interference in Hazrat Inayat's wordings – he has often warned against such measures. To my advantage one will find in later texts that he has had replaced it himself by 'genius'. Yet my proposal is to opt for my terminology as it has the clear advantage of linking the mind-beyond to the human mind. 'Genius' rather identifies with a quality of the mind here.

Could it be that – to personalize for a moment – my soul does express itself to me in these languages which may be known to me as a remembrance, alive but hidden? Should it be possible to find these qualities in one's life?

When one is learning the language of the angelic heart, might one be able to recognize and hear the whisper of the soul in its heart's tune? Learning such language? By fine-tuning one's antenna to the appropriate pitch of that sphere of consciousness. Refinement, subtlety.

When one is learning the language of the mind-beyond, might one be able to recognize and hear the sound of the soul in the language of the mind-beyond? Does one's consciousness travel in the here and now also? Does one allow oneself to try and 'step over' to a different mind-set, to a different heart-set? 'It is not our situation in life, but our attitude towards life that makes us happy or unhappy.' (Gayan, Bola) It is an art to discover these options in one's consciousness. Attunement, rhythm, and more, are keys to this discovery.

Let us therefore start an exploration into this land of the self, here and beyond. This land – which is one's consciousness as it manifests on each of these levels, potentially.

### IS THE SOUL A CONDITION?

Personally and for a long time the soul to me was a condition, staying in itself: peace, light, serenity, quiet, stillness. And right so – the ray has established itself in me. However, at the same time the soul is action. A ray is active, it is dynamic, an intense vibration. This ray is active in oneself – though mostly one is unaware. Because the soul is working unseen behind body, mind and heart, or rather working unseen, both inside and through each of these. Working as one's inner light. Working as one's life's energy. Vibrations, rhythm, no form, no word. It is abstract – therefore one's mind wonders whether it exists. At the same time, the soul is dynamic. How does one notice? It is the agent that moves heart, mind and body alike. The soul is life's energy, its force. Both wave

and particle. It expresses itself in breath, in the feeling heart, in the inspired and creative mind, in the healthy body. In beauty, in love, in harmony. Its nature is light so that it illuminates the path, its weight is light so that it lifts one from denseness; it can raise one to higher spheres, the exaltation of the soul creating peace and silence. Silence is creative of energy because silence attunes one's being to finer pitches of awareness. Spirituality brings one to a fresh awareness, and to the knowledge how to bring this treasure to the surface.

The soul is a 'matter' of experiencing, not of theorizing. Yet, naturally one turns to Hazrat Inayat Khan to consult him on the crucial and intriguing question: what is the soul? Or rather, what is it that one's soul may tell? Reading and studying his inspired texts by the light of one's own soul this study will be an experience of one's very soul: lifting and raising one's consciousness. That is the blessing that came to me so often when contemplating, studying and writing what Murshid was telling. Waiting for the words to come.

#### THE SOUL'S DIVINITY – AN ESSENTIAL CONCEPT

The issue became a living one to me, when I was struck by a passage in the teachings which awakened me, and incited me to start working on the concept of the soul. The Preface has precluded on the why of this essay. What is it about? Repeatedly Hazrat Inayat has taught his mureeds that the central task of the Sufi Message is to awaken humanity to the concept of the divinity of the soul. He tells that he considers this to be the central object of the Sufi Message:

*The central theme of the Sufi Message is one simple thing, and yet most difficult, and that is to bring about in the world the realization of the divinity of the human soul, which hitherto has been overlooked, for the reason that the time had not come. The principal thing that the Message has to accomplish in this era is to create the realization of the divine spark in every soul that every soul according to its progress*

*may begin to realize for itself the spark of divinity within. This is the task that is before us.*<sup>3</sup>

So, it has been overlooked but now the time has arrived.

And at another time he said:

*The solution to the problem of the day is the awakening of the consciousness of humanity to the divinity of man.*<sup>4</sup>

It is not about the individual only, it is concerning humanity.

What is the divinity of the soul? Inayat Khan calls the soul poetically the radiant ray of the divine Sun. At the same time the soul is part and parcel of divine consciousness, of cosmic consciousness. It is a drop out of the divine Ocean and a drop inside it, simultaneously. It is as in quantum physics. Is it a 'particle' or a 'wave', matter or energy? It is the one or the other depending on the observer. 'Observer', in this context, means one's consciousness. At the same time, the soul is the divine consciousness in man. A drop in the ocean – mighty when conscious of the ocean, limited when one knows to be a drop.

This struck me deeply as it made me realize that this had been my inspiration in life – the soul's identity. Thus I started a study

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3 CHERAGS' PAPERS, 'Our sacred task'.

4 SUFI MESSAGE VOL. IX 249.

Three more quotations:

*Its central theme is to produce the consciousness of the divinity of the human soul; and towards this end the Sufi teaching is given.*

SUFI MESSAGE, VOL.VIII SUFISM, 20

*The note that the Sufi message is striking at the present time is the note which sounds the divinity of the human soul – to make human beings recognize the divinity in the human soul.*

SOCIAL GATHEKAS 28

*The mission of the Sufi, the Sufi Message to the world, is the realization of this principle, the understanding of the divinity of the human soul.*

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Note 1: Two of the quotes only have been published. It really is a call to the mureeds, in that time. Is it not a call to humanity now?

Note 2: These five are the only times Inayat Khan made this call. May it be adequately answered. This essay contributes a beginning.



which now after many years has resulted in this essay. The study focuses on the pronouncements (expressions, aphorisms) Hazrat Inayat Khan made when he was asked about the nature of the human soul, in the first place. Such study can only be fruitful when it includes both mind and heart as essential components of the human being. The focus, therefore, is directed to their relationships, soul to heart, soul to mind. What about the body? The Sufi philosophy views the soul as one's life force, an energy, a flow, directed to the body, to the mind, to the heart, each of them as its instruments – which together function as an integrated organism: the human being. According to the 'plan' of the 'divine mind'.

Therefore, what is the soul, who is the soul? Can it be explained? Inayat Khan would find himself 'at a loss' when after speaking he was faced with this question bluntly. But when finding himself in a spiritually tuned situation he would speak out directly, and say that the soul is beyond perception, it can neither be seen nor heard, neither smelled nor tasted or touched. In this essay we will explore the field, and to our consolation we will discover that, though indirectly, the soul indeed perceives and expresses through the heart and through the mind.

The soul is a major theme to study and to work for indeed – in a culture which denies the very soul, where the concept of divinity is desecrated and replaced by what Inayat Khan signaled as prevailing trends already in the 1920s where 'materialism and commercialism are continuously on the increase', in a culture also where harboring ideals is derided at. When the soul is recognized as the real being of man, views on life will change. Some present-day problems will be seen in a different perspective. Problems will be interpreted as challenges, leading to new directions of thought. The final chapter, on Sufi anthropology, will return to this issue.

#### CONSCIOUSNESS – CONDITION AND FLOW

Next to the issue of the soul's divinity the other important question – it has been hinted at before – revolves around the concept of consciousness. It will turn out to be the key for understanding the soul's journey through the spheres.