

The Unseen
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Summer Camp, July 7, 2011

Toward the One,
the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty,
the Only Being,
united with all the illuminated souls
who form the embodiment of the Master,
the Spirit of Guidance.

Greetings, welcome to all of you. I just arrived from across the sea, from Suresnes, having lived this last year at Fazl Manzil, the home of Murshid and the Begum. And it's been an extraordinary time, and yet I'm very delighted to be returning and especially to be here with you today, gathering together, all of us as members of one spiritual family, the Hazrati Sufi family.

And why do I use this expression? As you know, the official name of our Order is The Sufi Order International. But perhaps many of you have met with quizzical expressions when you have been asked which order you belong to and you have given this response, because to some it seems to convey insufficient information. The Sufi Order International — which Sufi Order International? And then perhaps you explain that our lineage is from India through the Chishtiyya Order and continued and given a new life through the inspiration and teachings of Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan — for which reason we might call ourselves the Inayati Order, and many have been using this word.

However, in a certain place Murshid requests that his Order not be named after him. We might use the name Chishtiyya, but also we have the initiatic heritages of the Suhrawardiyya, Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya, though the Chishtiyya has been our keynote. But Murshid's own dispensation represents such a significant renewal and reorganization of our Chishti heritage that it seems proper to acknowledge that contribution in our very name. And so therefore we may well use the name Hazrati — Hazrati being the honorific by which we know our Murshid: Hazrat Inayat Khan. After all, the Mevlevi Order is named, not the Jelali Order or the Rumiyya, but the Mevlevi Order after his honorific. Likewise we may speak of the Hazratiyya.

So if you are asked of your sacred lineage and challenged to reduce it to a single word, this word may do. And above and beyond being a particular honorific that we have used to convey the deep honor and devotion with which we hold our Murshid, it has a very special meaning in Arabic — it means “presence.” Now, presence in Arabic is coupled with another term: *al-Ghayb* — the Invisible, the Unknown, the Absent. These terms go together.

There is a remarkable, extraordinary and beautiful passage at the beginning of the Sura Baqara, the Sura of the Cow, in the Qur'an Sharif, in which the Divine voice names four requirements for receiving Divine guidance and attaining the good, attaining fulfillment in life. If one is to be rightly guided on the path and to attain fulfillment, these four things are necessary.

One is having faith in the revelations of all prophets — literally, faith in what has been sent down, what has descended through the planes and has been received through the expanded heart of the Rasul, of all of the prophets of God and of all eras and all lands.

The second is to raise up praise, glorification, thanksgiving, benediction. So we have these two movements, the descending revelation and dispensation of grace, love and guidance that comes from the Source of existence, and our own response in prayer and glorification. This is the second necessity — to lift up prayer — to raise up, to stand up, to lift up one's praise in glorification.

And then, generosity — to be magnanimous, to be liberal, to be giving of, not what one has, but of what one has been given. We can't be generous with what we have; we don't really have anything. We can be generous with what we have been given, and what it behooves us to likewise give freely of. So, magnanimity — and here the word is from the root that we find in the Divine name *Razzaq*, the Provider and Sustainer — to partake of the qualities of the Sustainer and give freely.

And fourthly, to have faith in the Absent, the Mysterious, the Invisible — *al-Ghayb*. To have faith in the *Ghayb*, the Unseen, Unknown — to have faith. So what does this mean? What does it mean to have faith in the Unseen? What is the Unseen? The Unseen is all that is beyond the ken of our limited, bounded sphere of knowledge. It is the great mystery, a luminous reality that surrounds us, pervades us, but continuously eludes our grasp — that which we can never intellectually possess, never define, never fully account for — the Mystery of life, to have faith in it. And the word faith is an interesting word: *Amana*. It suggests more than mere agnosticism; it suggests more than merely recognizing that there is more than we know or perhaps ever can know. This quality of faith means reaching out into the Mystery. It means affirming a relationship with the Mystery, a relationship of trust, of attention, and ultimately of presence — *huzur*, from the same root as *hazrat*: presence. The Mystery and presence are deeply related. Presence is what illuminates the Mystery, reveals its magic, and the mystic path is in essence the path of presence, presence to the Unseen.

The Unseen has many dimensions, many faces, many aspects. The Unseen is the deep, immortal silence at the heart of all things. In the conditioned, agitated state of our diurnal minds this mystery is profoundly unseen, unheeded by us, and yet it is no less absolutely real. The songs of praise vibrating in every atom of existence are the symphony of *al-Ghayb*, the music of the Invisible. The inner workings of this physical body — fluid pulsing through our veins — the organic interconnections between the different organs, tissues and cells that make up this animate organism and the symbiosis between microorganisms that realize the ecological wholeness of our physical being are *al-Ghayb*, the Unseen, the Mystery. Each breath that is breathed out, where it goes afterward, the distance it travels, the plants that inhale it, its trajectory across the globe, is *al-Ghayb*. When we throw something away — a place called “away” — such a convenient place — that place is *al-Ghayb*. It exists, invisible to us — perhaps at the moment of heedless disposal; but it exists, it is real, and it is connected to every place the ground of which we will set foot upon.

The larger fields, systems, processes to which we belong, within which we are embedded, and the wholeness of these systems is *al-Ghayb* — absolutely real, mysterious in their complexity, in their

perplexing, bewildering and yet absolutely mathematically precise chaotic dynamics of transformation, emergence, disintegration. This wild, fierce, beautiful world in which we live is *al-Ghayb*. We see as much as we are given to see, and we are given to see as much as our quality of presence allows us to see and to hear and to taste, to feel, to smell. To the degree that we are caught up in the worries, anxieties, repressions, conditioned responses that make up so much of our day-to-day existence, our senses are veiled. Yes, we see enough to navigate the space immediately in front of us, but do we really see? Do we see in the sense of meeting what we see, engaging it with our soul — plunging into it, immersing ourselves in the presence of the landscape, the beings who compose the landscape, the Divine immediacy that palpably saturates all?

That is the straight path, the awake path, the path of moment by moment, breath by breath, inhaling the creation that is shown to us, breathing its perfume. And when we do so, more and more is shown to us. It's as if a reality that was at first two-dimensional has become three-dimensional. We see deeper into it, see beyond, zoom out from the narrow confines of our preoccupations and sense intuitively the signature of all beings, a signature that bears a story. Each breath that we inhale is a breeze that has travelled across the world. A rational mind will never succeed in accounting for all of its meanderings, and yet consciousness of Divinity, consciousness of the presence of Eternity in every moment will endow that breath with universality, will endow that breath with the awareness that this act is taking place in the temple of eternity. These breezes flowing through me have wafted through the universe, emerging out of the fount of creation, have traversed the bodies and minds of all beings — angels, djinn, stones, trees. What I take into myself is the breath of the whole universe, and that which I give out is my own signature, my answer, my response, my participation in the on-going, evolving, defining of the meaning of life itself.

Al-Ghayb is the Mystery in which we are plunged, and we are challenged and invited to know the Mystery, to attend to it, that it may reveal itself. There are different ways to know this Mystery. Through our intellect we may seek to better understand the world in which we live. We live in the company of trees, animals, waterways, weather patterns, seasons. If we wish to better appreciate the sacred mystery in which we live at the level of intellect, we might begin to study the life-transactions of the beings with whom we are intimately connected — to learn the names of the trees that surround us — we watch as the seasons pass to see the plants bloom, the names of the flowers, the trees — watch when they shed their leaves, watch when the moon is waxing, when it is waning, understand the influence of the movement of the earth around the sun, the movement of the moon. Where does one's water come from? The quality of the water? Where does the water go when you have used it? Things that one eats — where have they come from? What kind of landscape — how have they been raised? Who has cultivated the crops? Has that cultivation enriched or has it impoverished the landscape? If it is an animal, what has been the life story of the animal? When one partakes of animal flesh, what is the life story of that being that I am consuming? What has been its lot in life? That is *al-Ghayb*, when we pluck something and we buy it and we take it, put it into our bodies, behind it is a whole multidimensional story which is real, it happened, and it continues, it reverberates. But if we choose to close our eyes, then *al-Ghayb* is veiled to us; we are cut off. We do not have faith in *al-Ghayb*, we are not present to *al-Ghayb*, we're cut off.

So at the level of intellect we may begin to open ourselves to the Mystery, to *al-Ghayb*, by beginning simply to understand with our mind — which after all is the tool that we ordinarily use to make our decisions in daily life. We begin to ask these kind of questions, to consider the world around us, the relationship between beings whose interactions make life possible for us. The flesh that we are about to consume — what are the cellular memories in that flesh, since after all that flesh will momentarily merge with my own and become my flesh, the story of that animal becoming my story. If it has endured torture, that torture — my torture.

Hell is a very real place. It exists on earth. And Heaven is just as real and is just as present on earth. And both belong to *al-Ghayb*, belong to the Mystery. So one way of probing the Mystery, beginning to reconnect with the wholeness of the world — with the wholeness of the human community, the community of life, the biosphere, the living earth, the life of the galaxies — is to begin to study life, study life processes — not just live according to the promptings of a mass society that has forgotten these innate, inherent, fundamental connections. Open our eyes and rediscover them, study them.

And there is another way of knowing which is complementary to the knowing of the mind, and it is the knowing of the heart. This does not involve research; it involves *huzur*; it involves presence. It involves breathing with awareness. If a naturalist comes across an animal, he or she will study the movements of the animal, the migration patterns, the diet — all of these things, and that information will provide important knowledge that helps us to live in harmony with creation. But there is another level of knowing, the mystic knowing; and the mystic, when he or she meets an animal, he or she sees himself. He or she sees the Real. He or she sees God, the Eternal. Everything that one sees, one sees as the outer expression, the emanation, of an inner reality that is eternal, that is sacred, pure and invincible.

So, one lives in a landscape which is not only a superb example of the harmonious interactions of innumerable organisms, but one lives face to face with the very face of God. All that one sees, all that one meets is the Real, the True that has always been and will always be, thrust before you, though there is no you, though you are just the mirror in which that Reality shows Itself to Itself. Eternity is right now — what has always been and will always be, showing Itself to Itself, right now.

But that showing is also a progressive revelation. This whole universe and the planet on which we are privileged to live is an unfolding story, a story of continuous emergence. And we have been granted the incredible privilege and honor, but also the grave and solemn responsibility, of not merely witnessing this emergence and evolution of the Divine self-attainment, but also in participating in the flow of it. That is to say, that to the degree that we are capable of moving beyond self-preoccupation — which we think makes us free, free to do what we want and have what we want, while in reality making us captive, prisoners of our conditioning and of our most un-illuminated instincts — that if we would expand our boundary, transcend this narrowly defined fiction of selfhood, we would fulfill the true freedom that has been urged upon us by the Real to take part actively, by choice, in the enactment of all that is possible in God's open-ended exploration of the meaning of beauty.

So when one opens oneself in this new and different way, when one is no longer captive to a vision of life that revolves exclusively around a fictive personal self, then one begins to revolve around the Real,

and everything becomes real. And more and more *al-Ghayb*, more and more the Mystery reveals its reality and shows the straight path, shows the path of beauty, the path of revelation, the path of praise and glorification, the path of generosity and magnanimity, and the path of presence to the Mystery. And, opening in this way, we see what my father used to call “that which transpires behind that which appears.” We see that we have been caught up in appearances and missed the plot line of the story. A story is unfolding before our eyes, and we are actors, agents, in the story. We have a part to play, if we would awaken to what is possible. And we would see that we have been given to live at a time of tremendous consequence, a time of tremendous transformation, when all is changing rapidly, more rapidly than human memory can recall.

Over long eons these bodies evolved. Now our consciousness is undergoing transmutation, and that transmutation involves multiple permutations — contraction, and also expansion. We see in our time the very best and the very worst. Humanity’s powers have reached a kind of crescendo, and now a moment of collective choice is before us. The intelligence, the inventiveness, the creativity of the human species has brought us so far. The discoveries, the domestication of fire, electricity, utilization of elements in complex processes, giving rise to all manner of phenomena, has given us a special paramountcy in the world. We have, you might say, humanized the whole of the world, domesticated the planet, and in this sense it is now ours.

What does that mean? Already this responsibility is prefigured in the Qur’an, when it is said that God offered the *amana*, the trust, of the earth to the mountains, and the mountains shook and crumbled. They would not accept it, they could not. And all of the kingdoms and queendoms of creation were offered this trust, and they declined. Humanity took it, accepted it. And the very next verse says, “And lo they have proven foolish.” We have accepted the dignity, the honor to be the regents of God on earth. We have, unconsciously sometimes, consciously at other times, but always we have as a human species and now more than ever, placed ourselves as the regent of God on earth. We have made ourselves lord and master of creation.

Now, what is a lord? When we translate from Arabic, when we translate the word *rabb*, usually it’s translated as lord. In our Sufi prayers also we say “Beloved Lord.” Now, one meaning of lord is the meaning of a despot, a tyrant, the one who possesses power arbitrarily, exercises that power to maintain privileges over the ones that he or she has in his or her power. And to a very great extent that has been the meaning of our human lordship over the earth. We have made ourselves the possessors of the earth, we have taken what we have wanted, we have enjoyed all of the privileges that we could obtain, and heeded what we called the lower creation only insofar as certain maintenance was necessary that we might continue to reap all of the benefits that we sought.

But the when one looks at and studies the word *rabb* in Arabic, one finds that *tarbiya* comes from this word. *Tarbiya* means cultivating, raising, raising a child, raising crops, caring for, nurturing, protecting, bringing up. This is the real meaning, to steward creation. And this is the real sense of the responsibility that has been given to us, to be stewards of the creation. We have been given this mighty power, and now, we have become aware of the consequences of this power, that our actions reverberate and ultimately will rebound upon us. And not only will we suffer the consequences, but the whole myriad

community of life with whom we are connected will be sacrificed at the altar of our concupiscence. This will happen if we do not pause to feel silently into the *Ghayb*, into the Mystery, and trust it, be present to it, respect it. We can let our stewardship be simply our commitment to the One whom we serve, the Real revealed in every being, revealed in the whole community of life, revealed in the living systems that form the organism that is the universe, God's body — to serve the integrity of that body, opening to the Mystery, no longer merely throwing things into the "away," but drawing forth and returning all that is given to us into the Mystery, into the *Ghayb*, with trust, with faith, knowledge, and with presence.

And then, what will come? What is the result? This great unfolding story of which we are part is ultimately beyond our control. We are responsible, we have a voice, we have a number of acts in life to perform, a number of gestures to make, but in the end there are processes, there are arcs of becoming and unbecoming, rises and falls, ebbs and flows beyond our personal power.

Among ecological thinkers today there is a kind of bifurcation taking place, where there are some who insist that the harm that has been caused is still redeemable, that a plan is needed but that plan, acted upon, will yield results, and new different technologies and new political/economic/social strategies can solve the problems, and we need simply to proceed intelligently. There is another school that feels disillusioned, feels hopeless, feels that already such damage has been done that there is no turning back. The world is irreparably changed, and the very mentality, they would argue, that all can be repaired and salvaged is just another example of the unthinking, slavish devotion to progress, to control and management. So there is a philosophical conversation emerging in our time.

But then there is the vision of the mystic. The mystic knows the significance of responsibility; the mystic knows that every thought, word and action counts; the mystic knows that, having awakened to the beauty of the Real, the pursuance of the path of beauty is a necessity, come what may, befall whatever might. That is the pledge of the heart. Whether the life systems of the earth are doomed to continue to unravel, whether the precious, beautiful, green globe that we have known is in decline, or whether a new dawn is before us, whatever may befall, the responsibility still rests with each one of us. And we may live, act, according to our own highest ideal of truth, of wholeness, of beauty, whatever is to come.

And all things must end, sooner or later, whether as a result of human actions or other processes — the eventual dying of the sun, asteroid impacts. This planet will crumble, the biosphere will dissolve, but it won't be the end of life. *Al Hayy, al Qayyum* is ever-living and will continue always to renew creation again and again in forms far beyond what we are capable of imagining. Life is real and true and forever; it will never end. But our life, here and now, as human beings with a particular life story, links us with beings who are our fellow human travelers. And if we are committed to the compulsion of the beauty that enraptures our souls, then that beauty will guide us to act with beauty toward every being along the way, to continue to open our mind and open our heart, that we may always more and more fully walk in harmony, walk in grace, walk in integrity, that we may be present to the Mystery with every footstep.

And so, as the Prophet Muhammad said, “Even if you know that the world is to end tomorrow, plant a tree today.” And as Lord Krishna said in the Bhagavad Gita, it is attachment to the fruits of actions, to the consequences, the results of our actions, which imprisons us. The liberating action is the selfless action, the action that is done as sacrifice, done as an act of beauty. What is done in the service of the whole and offered up, come what may. Come what may, whatever is done as sacrifice in the service of beauty is liberating, is freeing.

O You, to Whom we belong, to Whom we have always belonged, to Whom we will always belong, You who appear to us in every face, You Whose body is the whole of the universe, Whose atoms are the stars, You who are the harmony between all beings, the web of life, the great tapestry into which we are all interwoven, allow us to sense You, to know You in all that we see, in all that we hear, in all that we taste and touch and feel.

But let us know too that You are always beyond, deeper than every surface, more distant than every horizon, and yet closer to us than our jugular vein, closer to us than we are to ourselves. Guide us, heal us, remind us that we are You, that we are in You. Every being — every being who is another revelation of Your face — let us walk in harmony with all beings, from the smallest invisible microorganism to the vastest, intergalactic intelligence. Let us be plunged in the community of Your life. Let us perceive Your innumerable transactions of life, swept up in the currents of Your glory and ecstasy. Let us walk humbly on the earth, knowing this as sacred ground, knowing this body given to us for our experience of life as a temple. Let our thoughts, our words and our actions always serve wholeness, always unite rather than divide.

O You, to whom we belong, this whole world is the sign of Your love, and buried in the heart of each one of us is a love for You, the fullness of which, the vastness of which, we have yet to discover. Reveal it to us, that we may love You as You love us. Amin.