
THE VISION OF INAYAT KHAN

Inayat Khan's Vision of Human Nature

Central to Inayat Khan's understanding of human nature is a conception of the universe as consisting of many different planes of being—the physical plane, the mental plane, the astral plane, the spiritual or soul plane, and the divine—that are composed of vibrations of varying amplitude and character. Inayat Khan explains, "One speaks of these planes as if they were places. In point of fact they are conditions, but what we call a place is also a condition. It is only because it is rigid in its physical appearance that we think of it as a place. . . ." ¹ These planes co-exist in the same "space" and interact with each other.

In Inayat Khan's vision of human nature, human beings are whole systems that consist of four interpenetrated and interrelated sub-systems, each of which exists primarily though not exclusively on a separate plane: the **physical body**, the **mind**, the **astral body**, and the **soul**. The physical body is material and exists largely on the physical plane. The mind, which includes the heart, is a field of energy that exists mostly on the mental plane. The astral body consists of a higher level of energy and exists on the astral plane. (All of Inayat Khan's terms are explained below.) Finally, the soul exists on the spiritual or soul plane. It is composed of an even higher level of subtle energy.

Another key element in Inayat Khan's vision is his belief that an ongoing evolution is the primary process in the universe. In his view, the divine was enfolded into matter when the physical universe was created. Over the millions of years matter has evolved back toward divinity. Humans are the most evolved beings with a material aspect on this planet. The attainment of God-realization by human beings is the fulfillment of the stage of

evolution in which human beings are actors. Evolution is a dual process of unfolding, as a species evolves as a whole through the actualization of involved higher potentials within individual members of that species. Now human beings are striving to unfold their inherent divinity both as individuals and as the cutting edge of the evolutionary movement on this planet.

A third element in this vision of human nature is that human beings include elements and qualities both of lower and higher forms of being. From the mineral kingdom, manifested primarily within the physical body, we have received stillness, hardness, and strength. From the vegetable kingdom, also manifested in the physical body, we have received fruitfulness and usefulness. From the animal kingdom, manifested in the physical body and in the mind, come our fighting nature and our tendency toward attachment. From the astral plane, manifested both in the mind and in the astral body, we have received invention, artistry, and genius. And finally, from the soul or angelic plane, manifested primarily in the soul, come illumination, love, and peace.

Put more simply, what constitutes the person, in sum, is light from the soul plane, knowledge from the astral plane, inherited qualities from his parents and ancestors, and various aspects of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms that are expressed through the physical body. Inayat Khan notes that it is the need of each person to “balance all these (aspects) knowing that he has been created neither to be as spiritual as an angel, nor to be as material as an animal.”²

A fourth element of Inayat Khan’s vision of human nature is his profound sense of human interdependence with each other and with everything else in the universe. “We are not fundamentally separate beings,” Sirkar Van Stolk explains, paraphrasing the words of Inayat Khan; “we are each a part, a cell, in that tremendous cosmic being which we call God.”³ Inayat Khan himself notes that “every individual is dependent upon every other. . . . When we see how limited man is even at his best, we see that it cannot be otherwise than that one must depend on another.”⁴

PHYSICAL BODY

The physical body is the element of the person that exists primarily on the material plane. Its aspects include the **limbs** and **trunk**,

the **five senses**, the **seven body centers**, and the **interrelated breathing and circulation systems**. Several of its important characteristics are its health, which is largely dependent on the circulation and breathing systems, its balance, and its sensitivity.

Inayat Khan explains that each of the five physical senses is actually a different part of the same basic sense, that there is really only one physical sense that acts through five separate channels. The purpose of the senses is experience, not indulgence, mastery, not slavery. He calls what humans experience through the senses the **audible life** to distinguish it from the **inner life**, that which is experienced through concentration, contemplation, meditation, and realization, as described below. The fineness of the senses helps to determine the quality and extent of the audible life.

Each human body has seven physical body centers within it that correspond to and interconnect with the **seven chakras**, centers that are elements of the person's astral body. These centers include the base of the spine, the area below the navel, the solar plexus, the heart, the throat, the "third eye" in the forehead between the eyebrows, and the "crown" at the top of the head. The body centers interact with the chakras in the process of intuitive knowing.

The breathing system operates on the material plane to bring oxygen into the bloodstream. In this process, it also gathers **prana**, subtle energy, which it feeds to the higher systems of the person. The breath touches the life-current that runs through all of the systems of the human being—physical body, mind, astral body, and soul—and connects them to each other and to their respective planes of being. One of the major determinants of the physical body's health is the regularity and the fullness of the breath.

The physical body has a particularly intimate interrelationship with the mind, as each can powerfully affect the state of the other. As Inayat Khan notes, "the thought of illness brings illness to the body. . . . At the same time cleanliness of the body helps to bring purity to the mind."⁵ The body also relates to the soul. When the body is cared for with an attitude of holy reverence, the energy that develops within the body supports the holiness of the soul.

MIND

The human **mind** is both an individual system within the person and a tiny part of the divine mind. The mind is not the physical

brain within the body but a field of energy existing primarily on the mental plane, which employs the brain as one of its instruments. It consists of six separate but interrelated faculties: the **thinking mind**; the **memory**; the **will**; the **reason**; the **heart**; and the **ego**.

- The thinking mind includes both a consciousness and a subconsciousness and is the creator of imagination and thought. Imagination is the outcome of the autonomic action of the thinking mind. It involves the apprehension of mental vibrations from the astral plane that the thinking mind first receives and then translates into a form. Imagination is a free flow that often expresses beauty and harmony. In contrast, thought is the outcome of the intentional action of the thinking mind. It is self-directed and controlled imagination in that it includes an element of will within its process. The thinking mind gives a form to each imagining and thought. Once created, each thought-form takes on an existence beyond the mind of its origin as an *elemental*. Such forms can be received by others and can affect the physical plane. Inayat Khan teaches that on the plane of mind, what you sow with your thinking mind is what you shall reap.

- A second faculty of the mind is memory. The memory is a largely automatic system that records all that comes to it through the five senses as well as whatever it may receive from the link between the personal mind and the universal, divine mind. Memory is responsive not to the use of willpower—when you will your memory to remember, it is actually more likely to forget—but to the quality of attention.

The clearer the attention through the senses, the more effectively the memory will operate. Inayat Khan describes three aspects of human memory: that which is easily retrievable; that which is at the bottom of the memory but may be recalled; and that which has not been perceived by the senses but has entered the personal memory through its link with the divine mind.

- Another faculty of the mind is will, which is an expression of

the divine power within human beings. The will is both a power of the mind and an action of the soul. It is the will that enables people to choose their actions and thus be guided not by their desires, impulses, and feelings alone but by their higher nature, their minds and souls. Desire is the enemy of the will. Surrendering to desire weakens the will. In contrast, experiencing desire and overcoming it strengthens the will, as does an optimistic and self-confident attitude toward life. To build the power of will, we must first avoid unintentional actions, speech, and thoughts. Then we must learn to check our desires and impulses, at first only for a short time each day but then for longer and longer periods of time. In this way, we learn not to be ruled by the desires of the body but to rule them from the higher self. Finally, we must learn to rule the mind through meditation and concentration.

The will plays an important role both in the maintenance of health and in the development of character. When the will is strong, the mind is ordered, helping the body to function well. When the will is weakened, the mind is disordered, allowing the body to become ill. A weakness of the will can cause not only illness but moral failure as well, for it is the will that gives a person the power to choose his actions. Strengthening the will gives a person the choice to act ethically, and it is a consistency of ethical action that constitutes good character.

- A fourth faculty of the mind is reason. It is reason that gives us the power to discriminate and decide, to evaluate and measure, to see angles and connections. There are three kinds of reason: the **lower reason** is attached to the impulses and desire and is often limited and selfish; the **middle reason** is attached to thought and can vary from self-centered to divinely inspired; the **heavenly reason**, which emerges from the soul, unfolds divine light within the personal mind through inspiration. To gain access to heavenly reason, we must be receptive and responsive, not always asking why but being open to receiving. "When one rises above what is called reason, one reaches that reason which is at the same time contradictory. . . . One sees death in birth, birth in death."⁶

Inayat Khan stresses both the value of reason and its inherent

limitations and dangers. He describes reasoning as “a ladder. By this ladder one can rise and from this ladder one can fall. Reason is a great factor and has the possibility in it of every curse and of every blessing.”⁷ The lower reason is unreliable because it seeks to serve desire and impulse. The middle reason “takes the side of the ego. . . . The mind has only to turn its face to reason, and reason stands there as an obedient slave. It gives the mind a reason to do either right or wrong.”⁸ Yet the middle reason can be guided toward right when it is directed not by the ego but by faith. Reason must be the servant of faith, not the master. When reason alone rules, failure and harm follow. Finally, the heavenly reason, the deepest reason, is wisdom itself. It is knowing from the soul expressed through the channels of the mind. It often seems paradoxical to the lower or middle reason because it exists on a higher level of being.

For reason to be trustworthy as a guide, not only must it be the servant of faith but it must also be imbued with feeling. “Intellectuality cannot be perfect without sentimentality. Nor can the thinking power be nurtured, nor the faculty of reasoning be sustained, without a continual outflow of feeling.”⁹

- The most profound faculty of the mind is the **heart**, according to Inayat Khan. Indeed he refers to the mind as the surface of the heart as often as he describes the heart as the depth of the mind. This interchangeability of reference clearly indicates the inextricable weaving of mind and heart as one central system within the human being. One aspect of the heart is the **physical organ** within the body of matter. Another is the “**little heart**,” the part of the body around the physical heart that receives emotion from the inner heart, feels the emotion most acutely, and transmits emotion throughout the physical body. This “little heart” is the vehicle of the **inner heart**, the third aspect, which is not matter but a subtle energy field, above substance. The inner heart is beyond the physical body and yet within it.

The energy of the heart is emotion. Emotion or feeling is a single energy that takes different forms. The vibrational level of emotion is higher than that of thought. The most powerful form of emotion is love, which can be felt as charity, generos-

ity, kindness, affection, endurance, tolerance, or patience.

Inayat Khan teaches that to grow spiritually, we must open our hearts to feel all of our emotions without being overwhelmed by them. In particular we must open our inner heart to love. The more the heart is opened, the more we can be sensitive to the feelings of others and the more we can give to others, for to love is to give. While we must not repress or deny our emotions, neither should we allow ourselves to be controlled by them. Rather, we must feel our emotions fully yet still control their impact upon us. The emotions are not the person any more than the thoughts are.

Intuition, Inayat Khan explains, rises from the depths of the heart. While intuition and imagination appear in much the same way, we can learn to distinguish between them. Imagination is more active, more the doing of the person's mind. Intuition flows into the consciousness that is passive, open, and trusting of an inner guidance. Imagination can also be intuition if it is not corrupted by reason.

Intuition arising within the inner heart has five forms: **impression**; **intuition**; ¹⁰ **inspiration**; **vision**; and **revelation**.

- a. Impression is dependent on an outer impression from something that leads to an inner knowing about that thing.
- b. Intuition is an inner guidance that is independent of any outer impression. It is first expressed as feeling and then transformed by the mind into thought. Intuition is the sixth sense. When the mind is tranquil and receptive, wisdom rises from the depths of the heart and flows onto the surface of the consciousness. The more we can feel compassion and sympathy, the more open we will be to intuition.
- c. Inspiration is a higher form of intuition from the divine mind down through the heart and into the consciousness as a stream of wonder and joy. Inspiration comes into the mind already organized into a complete idea. It can take five different forms: waves of thought; emotions; sufferings of the heart; a flow of wisdom; and a divine voice.

d. Vision is inspiration that comes through a clearness of the inner sight in the form of images.

e. Revelation is an even higher form of inspiration in which, through a fully awakened heart, the knower becomes one with everything in the universe, and every secret is revealed through the experience of identity of the knower with the known. Revelation, then, is the experience of fusion with the other.

- The sixth faculty of the mind is the **ego**, the limited self. The ego is formed in infancy when the soul identifies with the physical body. This identification creates the experience of duality: the "I" and the "other." The ego is the seat of desires and passions. It is the creator of disharmony through the manifestation of arrogance, wrath, attachment, and greed. The more the ego's desires are gratified, the more powerful it becomes.

For most humans, the development of the ego, the false self, is a necessary stage in unfoldment. As the child grows, the ego expands to include all sensation, emotion, imagination, and thought. The task of spiritual growth is to learn that body and mind are not the real self but only vehicles of the self, and then to disidentify with the ego and thus transcend its limitations. Inayat Khan describes four levels of ego development that trace an awakening to a conscious identification with the higher self, the soul: (1) the automatic ego, characterized by "an eye for an eye" orientation to others; (2) the self-disciplined ego, characterized by the ability to choose one's actions; for example, wanting to strike back when struck but choosing not to do so; (3) the ego of inner calm, characterized by a profound inner calm that fosters deliberate control, allowing one to see others as their evolutionary stage; and (4) the ego of blessings, characterized by the ability to remain serene and radiate a blessing outward in all circumstances.

In his discussion of the nature of the mind, Inayat Khan also explains the steps by which the mind can raise its quality of concentration and evolve toward what he calls God-realization,

bringing soul into the mind and thus transforming it into something beyond the mind. The first step is **concentration**, the experience of single-mindedness. The exercise of concentration involves fixing the thoughts on a single object by motion, repetition of a mantra, memory, or sight. It can also involve holding an image in the mind with the help of feeling or training the mind to watch its own process. The second step is **contemplation**, which is similar in structure to concentration except an idea is fixed upon rather than an object.

The third step is **meditation**, an opening to the silent life within and beyond which is the greatest teacher. Meditation involves going beyond the mind and awakening to wisdom by bringing soul qualities into the mind. It is experiencing "consciousness in its pure essence, which is not necessarily dependent upon the knowledge of names and forms."¹¹ Such experience brings access to the source of joy, peace, harmony, and power. The final step is **realization**, which is totally beyond the mind. With realization, the soul unfolds completely and what was the mind is transformed into an explicit expression of the divine consciousness.

ASTRAL BODY

The astral body is the aspect of the human being that exists on the astral plane, a higher and more subtle level than the mental plane. The seven chakras, the inner centers that are the seats of intuitive faculties, are elements of the astral body. Each chakra is a capacity that can be opened and brought into play. The astral body also brings higher levels of energy down into human life. This energy is manifested as genius, artistry, imagination, the creation of beauty.

SOUL

In the human being, the soul is the true self. The soul is a current, a spiritual ray, which exists first on the spiritual plane. The soul is the most essential manifestation of the divine. "The connection between the (divine) consciousness and the soul is like the connection between the sun and the ray (of light)."¹² The energy of the soul is light, love, beauty, and harmony.

Some souls remain on the spiritual plane; others descend to

the astral plane. Still others move below the astral plane and incarnate as humans. Before the human being's birth, the soul travels through the spiritual plane and takes on a luminous body. It then journeys through the astral plane and creates an accompanying astral body, a body of impressions. When the physical body is born, the soul joins with it, and when the mind is created, the interaction of the soul and the mind creates a new field of energy called the **spirit**.¹³

Inayat Khan explains that when the physical body of a human being dies, the soul returns to the spiritual plane. But his teachings about reincarnation are paradoxical. In some of his writings, he notes that there is no reincarnation, that each soul makes the cyclical journey from the spiritual plane only once. As souls return to this plane, however, they leave an impress on souls that are journeying to their incarnation on the material plane. This impress or influence is the mechanism of evolution. In other passages, however, Inayat Khan describes reincarnation as a reality, indeed as the means of evolution. He says, "Reincarnation is a fact, but we do not teach it."¹⁴ A resolution of this paradox is offered by Pir Vilayat Khan, Inayat Khan's son and also a Sufi teacher, who explains that reincarnation as it is commonly understood is not a literal truth but is a metaphor for a reality too complex for the human mind to comprehend.¹⁵

The soul has both an inner and outer experience. Its outer experience derives from its interaction with the mind and heart, as the soul and the mind and heart affect each other. The inner experience arises from the aspect of itself that becomes the spirit. The soul is motivated by five spiritual desires: (1) the desire to live with freedom; (2) the desire to gain spiritual knowledge; one manifestation of this desire is the child's intense curiosity; (3) the desire for power; the inner power of effacing the small ego and embracing the divine; (4) the desire for happiness; happiness is within the heart in the knowledge of the true self; and (5) the desire for peace within. Each of these soul desires is manifested in human life and helps to bring purpose and meaning to life, as does each soul's evolutionary movement toward the achievement of God-realization within the human person. Indeed, the power of the spiritual desires is a large part of the evolutionary motive force that propels humans to evolve toward increasing divinity.

Inayat Khan's Vision of Human Becoming

The teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan offer a richly detailed vision of human becoming between birth and age 21. This vision is organized by three primary characteristics:

1. The evolution of the child and youth follows a path that is relatively consistent, regular, and foreseeable;
2. Yet the experience of individuals can vary considerably within the bounds of this path, and the most important growth need of the child and youth is to be allowed to unfold at his own pace. As Inayat Khan explains,

. . . there is a time, there is a day, an hour, a moment fixed for the child to change its attitude: to learn to sit, to learn to stand, to learn to walk. But when the parents, eager to see the child stand or sit or walk, help it, the child will do it before the time, and that works against its development; because it is not only that it begins to learn to sit or to stand or to walk; there is a far greater meaning in it. These are different stages which an infant goes through in its spiritual life.¹⁶

3. The path of the child's unfoldment includes three eras:
 - a. from birth into the seventh year;
 - b. from the seventh year until 12 to 13 years of age: and
 - c. 12 to 13 years of age through 21 years of age.

While the child is involved in a spiritual unfoldment in his first twenty-one years of life, his more central growth needs during these years relate to the growth of his physical body, his mind, and his character and personality. Inayat Khan defines character as a learned form that the individual's nature takes on, a form created largely in childhood and built from habit. Personality is the finishing of character, the harmonizing of the individual's nature and his character.

Another important aspect of the child's unfoldment is his relationship to faith. Every child is born with faith. Yet the child

learns doubt through the gaining of knowledge. The experience of doubt is an essential part of growing up, yet the child must strive to maintain his faith, because faith, "a trust even in the absence of reason,"¹⁷ provides an important energy for his growth.

FIRST ERA

Inayat Khan divides the first era of childhood and youth into two periods: **infancy**, from birth to about two and a half years of age; and what he calls **babyhood**, from about two and a half years of age until into the child's seventh year of life.

In the first year of his life, the infant is still very much influenced by the energies of the spiritual plane. He really begins his earthly life only when he learns to creep. During the second year of life, the infant is powerfully influenced by the astral plane, and only after his second birthday does he become fully present in the material world.

When the child is born, the soul is unfinished.

The soul of an infant is like a photographic plate which has never been exposed before, and whatever impression falls on that photographic plate covers it; no other impressions which come afterwards have the same effect.¹⁸

The soul's need for positive influence—and vulnerability to negative influence—is the infant's most prominent characteristic in the first year of life. Inayat Khan speaks of the "condensing" of the soul as an irrevocable process that presents the infant's parents with a profound responsibility.

In the first years of life, the child begins to develop his will, his heart quality, and his mind. He starts to manifest his will as soon as he can act in any way, and the expression of his will without harmful restriction is essential to the fullness of his unfoldment. "If in childhood the parents take good care that the will was not broken, then the will would manifest itself in wonders. The child would do wonderful things in life if its will was sustained, if it was cherished."¹⁹

The child's heart quality is developed through the experience of nursing from his mother. The interaction that occurs with

nursing fills the child with love, and the mother's milk provides a naturally complete food for the nurturance both of the physical body and of the soul. The milk also aids the unfoldment of the physical heart and the inner heart directly.

The infant's mind begins to unfold when he is cutting his first teeth. "It is from that time that it [he] begins to take notice of things and begins to think. The coming of the teeth is only an outward manifestation; the inner process is that the mind is forming."¹⁹ When the infant stands, his power is beginning to manifest through the development of the qualities of enthusiasm, courage, endurance, and patience. When he begins to speak, his spirit is forming as his mind connects with his soul.

During infancy, the child needs to learn his first lessons in discipline, balance, concentration, and ethics. When he first gives his attention to his parent, he starts to learn discipline by learning to respond to the parent. He learns balance through the experience of an even rhythm in the course of his days, a balance between activity and relaxation that is drawn within him and developed as an inner rhythm. His concentration develops as he learns to focus on a single object. Finally, his ethical sense begins to unfold as he learns to give as well as receive.

Inayat Khan describes babyhood, from about two and a half years of age into the seventh year, as a time of life when the child needs to experience **kingship**, the freedom and happiness of his own direction and the absence of worry, anxiety, competition, and ambition. The child's need in these years is to experience the fullness of his own initiative for play. He needs not to be directed toward the learning of language or numbers but to be encouraged to express himself through the means of his choosing. "In the children's play, in their hustle and bustle, in their crying and jumping and running and climbing, their soul is expressing itself."²⁰ If adults allow the child to experience this time of kingship fully, the child can unfold to his potentials on various levels of his being. In contrast, if they control the child's life to suit their own needs, expectations, or ambitions, his energy, enthusiasm, and spirit will be limited and narrowed.

During this period of babyhood the child learns primarily through imitation. Thus, he needs to have positive human and natural models that he can imitate. He needs to interact with adults who can offer him attitudes and behaviors that are worthy

of emulation. He also needs to “be near to nature, where it [he] should absorb what nature gradually teaches.”²¹ Nature is a profound teacher for a child of this age, not through any intentional process of teaching but through the child’s experience of immersion in the rhythms and cycles of the natural world. Also, by appreciating the beauty in nature, the child discovers the beginnings of worship. In bowing to natural beauty, he begins to satisfy the innate predisposition in every soul to experience love and express this feeling through worship. This unfoldment to the first step in worship has a profound importance for the child’s spiritual evolution both in the present and in the future.

SECOND ERA

According to Inayat Khan’s vision, for most children the first era of unfoldment comes to an end and the second era begins sometime during the seventh year of life. This year is a time of transition from babyhood to the second era, which he calls **childhood**. Often the child experiences conflict within himself at this time, sometimes expressed as restlessness or obstinacy. He can become much more active than he has previously been and less responsive to others.

Inayat Khan divides the era of childhood into two periods: **early childhood**, from ages 7 through 9 years; and **late childhood**, from ages 10 through 12 or 13 years. Early childhood is “like the soil that is just prepared for sowing the seed. It is such a great opportunity . . . to sow the seed of knowledge and righteousness in the heart of the child.”²² In the seventh year, the child’s inner conflict dissipates as he enters this new era of his life. He grows calmer and more harmonious within and more responsive to influence from others. At this age he can grasp an ideal for the first time. The first ideal that he must understand is a respectful attitude toward his elders. It is essential that this respect flow from the child as an experience that gives him real joy, not just as the heeding of external convention or pressure.

The learning of respect for others is particularly important, because it is through such experiences of respect that the child learns to respect himself. Self-respect, not a false pride but a sense of honor, is another ideal that the child must learn in these years. A third ideal, which relates to the ideal of respect for elders, is a sense of duty to his parents and the feeling of joy in fulfilling his

duty. A fourth ideal is the quality of thoughtfulness in speaking and acting and an accompanying awareness of what is appropriate for him as a child. A fifth ideal that he must learn is a feeling for the spiritual. "It is in childhood that the spirit is responsive, and if that God-ideal is inspired at that time . . . one has given the child a start on the path to God."²³

In early childhood, the child is very much open to learning through aesthetic activity: drawing, painting, music, and dancing. The child's need for growth is not artistic training but, rather, the opportunity for free expression of his soul through the activities of the arts. It is a time to express as he wishes without a lot of direction and, through his own initiative, to experience gracefulness and lightness.

In these years the child also needs to learn patience, endurance, and perseverance. He is impatient by nature, and so it is important for him to learn to complete things, to wait when necessary, and to begin to develop a habit of patience. While adults should not force this, they can gently yet persistently encourage the child to be patient and to persevere.

Finally, the child's experience can grow from a generalized admiration of natural beauty to more evolved forms of worship. One of his tasks for growth is to find or develop specific ways in which he can experience worship at his new level of knowing and connect the ideal of the divine with his inner feelings.

In his eleventh year, the child unfolds into the second part of childhood. "This is a period when children drink in and assimilate any knowledge, and that knowledge grows with them in their growth."²⁴ One major way that the child learns is once again through imitation, though of a more complex nature than his earlier imitative experience. What his unfoldment requires is examples who are worthy of his imitation, wonderful personalities and heroes in history and myth, and caring and evolved adults with whom to interact in daily life. The child also begins to develop greater powers of concentration in these years and needs the opportunity to practice artistic and craft activities that require attention, patience, and fine coordination of his hands and eyes.

Another important aspect of the child's unfoldment is the evolution of his relationship with nature, for this relationship affects both his intellectual and his spiritual growth. He needs regularly to experience nature directly. As he learns to become

knowledgeable about the natural world, he develops the intellectual capacities to classify, define, and discriminate. As his feeling for the beauty and wonder of nature deepens, he opens to his own spirituality. As Inayat Khan explains,

In order to be spiritual . . . one must communicate with nature; one must feel nature . . . The faculty of communicating with nature . . . is the principal thing for every soul in his spiritual development . . . If the child is deeply interested in the knowledge of nature, that shows that it has taken the first step on the path of philosophical truth.²⁵

In the second part of childhood, the child's inner bent begins to reveal itself, the first indications of what his strengths and proclivities will be as an adult. It is important that he both develop his strengths but also continue to work with tasks and challenges for which he has less natural inclination, so his growth does not become one-sided or narrowed.

At this time, sexual identity also begins to be important to the child. Inayat Khan describes the child's needs in this area as follows:

It is the psychology of the boy and of the girl which makes it necessary to give certain things to the boy and certain things to the girl; but as they develop they take each others' qualities; with development it comes naturally. Balance is best, whether in the boy or in the girl; and balance comes through opposite qualities.²⁶

Thus, while the child needs to develop the characteristics archetypally associated with his own sex, he also needs the opportunity to gain the balance that comes from developing characteristics that are usually associated with the opposite sex. This kind of balance in his experience will help him to unfold as a person who is not limited by societal sex roles but who has developed both the female and the male potentials within him.

THIRD ERA

The third era of childhood and youth starts in the thirteenth or

fourteenth year with the ending of childhood and the beginning of youth. It is a time of inner conflict and struggle, of nervousness, agitation, and restlessness. The youth experiences an inner inconsistency that is manifested as inconsistent behavior. Sometimes he is clear and responsible, while other times he is absentminded and "impossible."

In the first few years of this era, the youth is no longer a child, but neither is he yet an experienced person. He does know the beginnings of adult comprehension, maturity, and development of the spirit. At the same time his struggle both to leave childhood and to mature is evident in his moodiness and self-absorption. During the middle three years of this era, the youth begins to establish a center and seeks balance and self-control. In the final three years, he clearly becomes more an adult than a child, establishing more consistently his clarity and his self-possession.

For the youth to unfold positively, he needs to be treated appropriately by adults. It is essential that adults not antagonize or alienate the youth but remain in relationship with him throughout this era. While the danger of estrangement is always present, adults can establish a nurturing relationship with the youth if they trust in his good attributes, appreciate them, and encourage him to continue to develop them. The adults must strike a fine balance, neither holding the youth in repressive check and inciting rebellion nor spoiling him by prematurely removing adult supervision. The youth needs firmness and consistency from adults to support his growth but always enough and increasing room to experience his independence and be responsible for it. The role of adults in the youth's unfoldment to maturity is critical, for only through the experience of interacting with adults who are caring, supportive, and consistently engaged with him in a balanced way can the youth grow into maturity without prolonging his adolescence into the next decade of his life.

The era of youth is a time when the young person is predisposed to self-absorption, to involvement with his "I-consciousness." While much of this focus is necessary for his development, he needs adults to help him experience life beyond the level of "I, me, mine," not with critical judgment or condemnation but through a gentle extension of his vision and reach beyond himself. His mind is still taking shape in these years, and he needs to be involved in experiences that open up and expand his feeling and thinking beyond his ego. Another way in which the youth's self-

absorption needs to be softened is through his cultivation of a passive, in-taking attitude that he can practice for short periods of time on a regular basis.

The youth also needs to work consciously to develop his will. One way through which he can do this involves his articulation of a moral ideal, a natural activity for young people, and his conscious, ongoing attempt to embody his moral ideal. He can also help his will to unfold through the practice of will-related tasks and exercises.

Inayat Khan's Vision of Child Raising and Education

Inayat Khan teaches that conscious action by parents and teachers is essential to the physical, mental, moral, social, and spiritual unfoldment of the child and youth. While he strongly advocates allowing the child to develop according to his own inner law, he is equally forceful and clear in the case he makes for the child's need for education—for support, guidance, and help from adults—to grow up into the fullness of his potential.

The central focus of education, Inayat Khan maintains, is the study of unity: learning where and how things in the world unite and interrelate. The child must learn about the profound interdependence of all things on all levels as well as about the necessity of human interdependence and the unselfishness that makes interdependence work. With unity and interdependence as the focus, Khan describes the goals of education as

the knowledge of oneself and of one's surroundings: the knowledge of others, both those who are known to us and those who are unknown and away; the knowledge of the conditions of human nature and of life's demands: and the knowledge of cause and effect, which leads the end to the knowledge of the world within and without.²⁷

A second focus of education, almost as important as the first, involves helping the child to nurture a harmonious and positive attitude toward life. Attitude is a channel for effort. The right attitude brings the child's effort to the fore and helps him to accomplish what he seeks. The right attitude also helps the child to treat

himself as a good friend, to respect himself and use his energies well.

The initial and most important phase of the child's education consists of the child raising he experiences with his parents during the first seven years. As the child learns primarily from example during these years, his parents are his first and most influential teachers. Their simple yet always demanding task is to be worthy of imitation. "The parents must themselves learn to be examples for their children. No theory has influence without practice."²⁸ Later on when the child goes to school, his parents need to connect his home experience with his experience of school.

FIVE ASPECTS OF EDUCATION

In his teachings about education, Inayat Khan first examines the five aspects of education: physical education; mental education; moral education; social education; and spiritual education. Then he explores the particular educational needs and potentials of the child and youth at each step in his unfoldment.

1. **Physical education** must begin in infancy. The child can learn to move his hands and feet rhythmically to music. When he is older, he can learn dance and gymnastics not as a chore but as play. Sound physical education includes a healthy yet simple diet and the experience of a harmonious rhythm in daily life, one that includes active play and exploration outdoors and indoors, a time for resting consciously—perhaps listening to a story or quiet music, or looking at pictures—and long and regular sleep.

2. **Mental education** involves helping the child to develop both the power and the fineness of his mind. Later on at an appropriate time in his unfoldment, it also includes helping him to develop his reason.

The education of the child's **mental power** must focus on the following:

- Helping him learn to concentrate by engaging him in activities that call for simple-minded attention.
- Helping him develop strength of mind by encouraging him to

become self-confident in what he thinks, says, and does. The child learns self-confidence when he is allowed and encouraged to discover for himself and think and act from his own sense of rightness. The adult's role is to encourage him to explore on his own in this way, to support his efforts in doing so, and to resist the temptation to force beliefs upon him.

- Helping him gain a strong feeling for his own inner rhythm and the inner tranquility that living his own rhythm brings to his mind. Tranquility of mind brings the child balance, self-control, and self-confidence. The adult's role is to be aware of the child's rhythm and bring him back to it whenever he gives way to excesses of excitement or passion.

The education of the child's **fineness of mind** must focus on the following:

- Helping him evoke clarity, keenness, and subtlety in the perceptions of his senses.
- Helping him develop a sense of appropriateness in his speech and actions and to be guided by this sense.
- Helping him learn a gracefulness in his manner, which can evolve into good manners as he grows older.

Finally, when the child is ready to develop his reason, he needs to learn a receptive, responsive attitude that guides him first to be open to receiving and then to reasoning. He also needs appropriate practice in all of the aspects of reasoning and gentle guidance from an adult in applying his reason to the events and challenges of his life.

3. The child's **moral education** centers on his development of five qualities. One is the right quality of love as service to others. This quality of love is founded in consideration and often requires sacrifice. The child learns love first by being loved by an adult, yet this parental love must not be expressed in such a way that it spoils the child. The child who is loved will manifest the spirit of generosity, and the parent must nurture and support this spirit, as it is the opening of the heart. Such generosity cannot be taught,

but it can be encouraged once it appears on its own. Generosity leads to the expression of other forms of love: tolerance, forgiveness, endurance, and fortitude. The spirit of generosity also leads to the expression of consideration for others.

In helping the child's quality of love to unfold, the adult must be careful not to compel but to guide. The adult's guidance of the child must come as positive support, not as criticism of limitation or failure. As Inayat Khan notes, "Teach consideration by praising the child when he shows consideration, not by accusing him of inconsiderateness."²⁹

The second quality that the child must develop as a part of his moral education is a cluster of interrelated traits: humility, gentleness, gratefulness, and a sense of justice. When the child develops these traits, they help to purify his heart. And the energy of the heart as it becomes more pure helps the child to embody these traits even more.

A third quality is a keen sense of harmony. To foster this learning, the child needs to experience harmony in his daily rhythm and in the natural world. Another quality is a proper understanding of beauty. To gain this, he must regularly experience beauty both in nature and in the creations of human beings. A fifth quality involves becoming conscious of and having a feeling for his duty to every person in the world.

4. **Social education** engages the child in learning his relation and duty to everyone and everything around him. He needs to learn what is expected of him in every relationship and the importance of fair dealing, give-and-take, reciprocity, and the honoring of one's word in relations with humans and the rest of the natural world. The child also must learn a sense of harmony in and of the world and a deeply felt appreciation of the ideal of the human community. As Inayat Khan teaches:

For the world is a family, and the right attitude of a young soul must be to see in every man his brother and in every woman his sister; he must look on aged people as he would on his father or mother.³⁰

5. **Spiritual education** involves the child in becoming aware of the ideal of the divine, of the oneness, both within and outside himself. It is not the learning of a religious belief but the appre-

hension of the essence of the divine, which he can learn to call upon for help and guidance and grow toward. The child must learn the habit of feeling and expressing his gratitude toward the divine within and outside himself at least once each day. He must also be encouraged to be sincere and genuine, for these qualities are the manifestation of the spiritual energy within him in the world of human relationship.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE FIRST ERA

In his discussion of education, Inayat Khan details the educational needs of the child and youth in every stage of his unfoldment from birth through twenty-one years of age.

In infancy (birth to about two and half years), the best way for the parent to educate his child is to work with the child's own ongoing growth, particularly the development of his heart qualities. "The calmness, the quietness, the tenderness, the gentleness, everything the mother cultivates in his nature at that particular time when the infant is nursed, the infant will receive as a lesson in its cradle."³¹

The parent must learn to control the infant not by mastering him, which weakens his will, but by establishing a friendship with him. Experiencing a friendship with his parent sustains the infant's will and helps him to evolve. The parent also needs to be patient with the child and avoid annoyance as much as possible. The parent's annoyance harms the child's nervous and subtle energy systems, causing them to contract. The infant experiences this contraction both as depression and as fear, emotions that can take hold within him and endure as he grows up. The more patience the parent has with the child, the better, because the parent's patience both avoids the harm of contraction and strengthens the infant's will.

The parent must also be conscious and purposive in his interactions with the infant, particularly when he gives objects to the child. "Even from infancy every object that is given to the child must inspire him with its use. An object that has no use, that serves no purpose, hinders the progress of an infant."³²

In his first three years of life, the infant's education should focus on the learning of affection, discipline, balance, concentration, ethics, and relaxation. He learns affection and love through

his nursing and the consistent experience of loving care and attention from his parents. When the infant first gives his attention to his parent, the adult can begin to teach discipline to the child by calmly repeating the desired action before him.

For instance, the infant wants something which it should not have, while the guardian wishes that it should play with a particular toy. This toy must be given continually into its hand; and when the child throws it away, or when it cries, give it again; and when the child does not look at it, give it again. . . . It is a wrong method when the guardian wishes to control an infant and wishes to teach it discipline by forcing a certain action upon it. It is repetition which will bring about discipline. It only requires patience.³³

The parent can help the child to learn balance by consistently helping him to regain his normal inner rhythm whenever he loses it. Often when he becomes too excited, either laughing or crying, the infant cannot re-establish his own balance but needs help.

When an infant is very excited, then the rhythm of its action and movement is not normal. By clapping the hands, or by rattling, or by knocking on something one can make the rhythm of the infant change. . . . However excited the infant may be, begin by making some noise in its rhythm, and then bring it to a normal rhythm. . . . The excitement will abate; the whole condition of the infant's mind, the blood circulation, the movement, the expression, everything will change to normal rhythm.³⁴

Through the repetition of this inner balancing of the infant, the adult can help the child learn to gain control of his own inner rhythm and of his balance.

The child learns concentration by focusing his attention on things that attract him: colored objects, fruits, flowers, and so on. He needs to have ongoing access to objects that attract his interest. As he focuses his attention on these, he begins to develop his concentration.

The parent can help the infant learn the beginning of ethics by giving to him and asking him to give in return. It is essential that

the parent not force or compel the child to give but only persist with calm and gentle requests. Eventually the spirit of generosity, the essence of morals, will arise within the child, and he will begin to give back for the pleasure of giving.

Finally, the infant needs to experience full and satisfying relaxation as a part of his daily pattern. He needs to be calm and aware, to be resting and turning inward, and to be in a deep and peaceful sleep. The parent must organize the child's day so he can experience each of these conditions on a regular basis. At the very end of infancy, the parent can teach the child to be silent for a moment. Such a silence is the next step in the child's learning of concentration.

In babyhood (from about two and half years into the seventh year) the child learns most by imitation. Once again the greatest responsibility of the parent is to work with his own unfoldment, so that he can provide the child with examples that are worthy of imitation. Inayat Khan strongly urges that the child not be taught anything formally in these years nor even encouraged to learn letters and numbers. He explains that the learning of symbolic languages can wait until the next era of the child's life. Now his energy is better directed into his own play and expression, for it is through these activities that his soul can best grow and unfold. What the parent needs to "teach" the child is a regularity in the rhythm of life: eating, playing, sleeping, and sitting quietly. The adult can teach this most powerfully by example, though he can also direct the child by praising the child's accomplishments in living a balanced rhythm.

In these years the child needs to grow accustomed to sitting in silence for short periods of time. Once he becomes comfortable with this, he will soon learn to cherish its peace and warmth.

Inayat Khan suggests that the parent guide the child both with praise and with reasoning. As he explains:

Never for one moment imagine that the child will not take in your reasoning. If not the first time it will take it in the second or third time. One must continue to reason with the child; and by doing so the guardian brings the child closer to his spirit, because the child feels a friendship between itself and the guardian.³⁵

The parent should scold or punish the child only as a last resort. If he must scold or punish, the adult should do so with a spirit of gentleness, never with anger or any other intense feeling. The child needs to experience the scolding or punishment only enough to know that he is being punished. It is important that the parent not frighten the child, for the shock of fear hinders the enthusiasm of the soul to grow and evolve.

In babyhood the parent can begin to help the child learn manners, again by praising his good behavior rather than pointing out or punishing his limitations.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE SECOND ERA

In his seventh year the child needs a good deal of attention as he experiences the conflicts that mark the passage from the first era of his life into the second. If possible, he should stay at home during this year and not go to school until after his seventh birthday, because what he needs is not the competitive life of the school but the comfort of his home. This seventh year is a particularly important time when the child can benefit most not from structure and competition but from freedom and happiness. Once he has moved through this transition into early childhood, then he will be ready for the wider and more demanding world of the school. When a child is faced with anxiety and competition too soon, he grows tight and restrained, unable to open to his full potential. In contrast, when he comes to the competition of the school at the proper time, his mind has matured and the challenges of school are not limiting but enlarging.

Inayat Khan explains that to teach the child in early childhood, the first half of the second era, the teacher must befriend the child and influence him with caring, praise, and inspiration. The teacher must not rule the child or try to compel his interests or enthusiasms. Nor must the teacher attempt to train him in particular skills other than the learning of language and numbers, as such learning is not appropriate for this age. Rather, the teacher must perceive the soul qualities already growing within the child and help him to express them.

One powerful way to guide the child is to offer him praise and appreciation for his own actions that are positive. Another is to

encourage him to express himself through drawing, painting, music, and dance and to provide him with many opportunities for such expression. Once the teacher has become the child's friend, he can help the child overcome his natural impatience, learn to complete what he begins, and develop the habits of being patient and of waiting.

In these years the child also learns profoundly from stories that engage his interest and offer him a meaning to consider and understand.

In no other way will the child absorb ideals as it will do in the form of stories. The stories told in its early childhood will remain with it all through its life . . . every year, as the child grows, the story will have another meaning; and so there will be a continual development of the ideal, which will become a great blessing in the life of the child.³⁶

Late childhood, the second half of the second era, is a time when the child is open, interested, curious, and hungry for knowledge. Although the teacher can be a little more direct in his instruction of the child, he still needs to limit his formal teaching to a minimum and engage the child in learning through a rich and varied array of informal activities that focus on conversation, exploration and discovery, and imagination.

In these years the child needs to spend a good deal of time exploring the natural environment, becoming familiar with nature, and gaining a feeling for the natural world. "There is so much to be learned from plant life, from birds, animals, insects, that once a child begins to take an interest in that subject, everything becomes a symbolical expression of the inner truth."³⁷ Such an interest in and feeling for nature also provides a grounding for later intellectual and spiritual development.

The child also must learn about his family origins and history and about the characteristics, aspirations, and customs of the people of his country. Inayat Khan suggests that the teacher introduce the child to the various customs, explain the psychology and the meanings of them, and let the child "see for itself if it is a custom worth following or better forgotten."³⁸

In these years the child can begin to learn metaphysics, "just enough for it to know that there is a soul, that there is a mind, that

there is a body; that there is a relation between the soul and the mind, and the mind and the body."³⁹ The teacher can also engage the child's imagination in considering the nature of the world he knows and how he would like to re-vision the world to make it a better place. This kind of imaginative activity gives the child's soul qualities an avenue of expression through his imagination and involves the child in considering his own contribution to the evolution of human beings.

The child still responds powerfully to movement, music, drawing, and other artistic expression. He can begin to understand the role of skill in these activities and want to develop such. Any instruction in these skills must be balanced and not overbearing. The child is also still very much intrigued by the lives of heroes and heroines. The teacher can engage him in learning about the stories of worthy personalities from whom he can learn by example.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE THIRD ERA

Inayat Khan describes youth as a season of blossoming, a time of rising physical and mental energies within the human being. It is also a time when the young person explores his own authority to know, feel, and do and, in the process, becomes less receptive to adults than he was as a child. Given this movement toward independence, the education of the youth must rely on presenting him with consciously selected impressions and encouraging him to explore and make sense of them for himself.

The education of youth depends mostly on impressions. Sometimes you may make a youth read books and that will not help . . . once you show him the phenomena, the example of what you are saying, and let the youth see with his own eyes what are the effects of different causes, then the teaching is given in an objective way; and in this manner wise guardians educate a youth.⁴⁰

In teaching the youth, the teacher must be careful not to force anything on him, for this will only motivate him to resist or rebel. Rather, the teacher needs to make the impressions of conditions,

situations, and personalities available to the youth and suggest possible courses of exploration that he can pursue.

Inayat Khan discusses the education of the youth in terms of his five categories of education: physical, mental, moral, social, and spiritual. In his physical education, the essential quality that the youth needs to develop is balance: in sleep, diet, relaxation, and exertion. The youth's natural inclination is toward excess and imbalance. The teacher can help the youth learn balance by offering ways through which the young person can discover the effects of imbalance and balance for himself.

In his mental education, the youth must learn to use his reason with power and discrimination. The teacher can encourage the unfoldment of the youth's reason by asking him questions about everything that he says and does, not in a way that confronts him but, rather, in a way that gently draws out his processes of thought. The teacher must be sure to place this questioning at the level of the youth's thought, not at his own level.

While one way to help the youth develop his reason is to question him, another is to "make lines of thought and . . . place them before him, in order that he may use the lines as a track to follow."⁴¹ In this way, the teacher provides the youth with models of clear and mindful reasoning that he can emulate, usually without even being aware of his emulation. These models of thought give the youth a way to feel clear thinking as well as conceive of it with his reasoning. As the teacher questions the young person and provides models of thought, he must also encourage consideration for others in the youth, for such consideration facilitates good, independent thinking.

Another aspect of mental education involves the imagination. The teacher can help the young person to cultivate his imagination by directing the young person's attention to what is beautiful, then asking him to imagine how he can make it even more beautiful and complete.

A third aspect of mental education involves concentration and receptivity. The youth tends to be more expressive than receptive in this era, yet it is important for him to cultivate his capacities for concentration and receptivity if he is to continue to evolve both now and later. The teacher can help the youth learn the ability to be passive and absorptive, not by urging this attitude upon him, but by engaging him gently in receptive experience. When presented with an opportunity to concentrate and be receptive as a

suggestion rather than a demand, the youth will often welcome this experience and learn to treasure the calmness and peace of concentration and receptivity. This kind of experience also helps the youth to increase his mental strength, which is dependent on his capacity for single-mindedness.

The practice of concentration and receptivity through silence, breathing exercises, yoga postures, and simple meditations fosters not only strength of mind but also of will. The nurturance and strengthening of his will is a critically important task for the youth, and he can benefit from all the guidance and nurturance that he can receive from an adult. In these years his heart quality is still unfolding, and his emotions, like everything else about him, are ripe for the abuse of excess. The more that he can develop the clarity of his reason and the strength of his mind and particularly of his will, the more he will be able to open his heart without giving way to the potentially damaging excesses of emotionality that are too often the norm for youth.

Finally, the youth is highly sensitive to all the conditions around him. If there is sorrow, disharmony, and depression around him, these feelings go right to his heart and limit him, for he can feel it all but as yet do little about its causes. For this reason Inayat Khan explains that "it is not fair [for adults] to draw sympathy from the youth . . . for one's pains and troubles. . . . If pain is sown in the heart of the youth, decay develops at the root of his life, making him bitter all through life."⁴² Thus, Inayat Khan urges that parents and teachers respect the specialness of youth, which is "the springtime of the soul,"⁴³ and as much as possible avoid burdening the young person with the difficulties of their own lives.

In his moral education, the youth needs to create an ideal for himself, not just accept one given to him by adults. Then he must strive to fulfill his ideal. The teacher can foster this process by engaging the youth in exploring and articulating his ideal and by supporting his efforts to live according to his ideal. The youth's ability to be guided by his ideal is largely dependent on the nature of his will, so the teacher must involve the youth in evoking and developing his willpower. Also, the teacher can help the young person to ground his ideal in dignity and honor by involving the youth in exploring what honor and dignity mean to him, in terms of both knowing and feeling. A final aspect of the youth's moral education has to do with his consideration for others. The teacher

can help the youth learn about his duty to others by engaging him in exploring his sense and feeling of his obligations. The teacher's role in all of this, then, is not to offer an ethical standard to the youth but to help him to explore and articulate his own integrity.

In his social education, the youth needs to work on expressing sincerity in his relationships with others. A common tendency for a youth is to go along with the crowd, even if such is not genuine behavior for him. The teacher must help the young person learn to evoke sincerity within himself and be willing to take the risks of being genuine rather than superficial, for sincerity and genuineness are qualities of the soul that must be evoked and expressed, not held in by fear.

The fifth category of education is spiritual education. Youth is a time not of open and evolved spirituality but, rather, of experiencing religion while beginning to learn of an "inner stillness." Inayat Khan explains the difference between religion and spirituality as follows: "Often spirituality is confused with religion. . . . Religion for many is that which they know to be their people's belief; spirituality is the revealing of the divine light which is hidden in every soul."⁴⁴

The adult can encourage the youth to participate in a religion, though, of course, without forcing him in any way but only responding to whatever interest he shows on his own. If he learns one religion in these years, then as he unfolds spiritually later in life he will understand the meaning of all religions for human beings and how religion relates to spirituality. While the experience of religion will support the spiritual growth of the youth, the adult needs to help him avoid adopting any of the vanity, bigotry, or fanaticism that are too often associated with religious groups.

Though the youth does not open fully to his own spiritual nature in this era, he can prepare for such an opening by learning to experience an "inner stillness." This stillness comes from opening his heart to his spirit. Related to this stillness is the youth's need to learn to "soften his heart," which will also help him to open to his own spirituality in later years.

It is the constant softening of the heart of the youth that is necessary. There are two ways of softening the heart: one is by helping the youth to open himself to beauty which is shining in all its various forms. The other is to give him a tendency to righteousness, which

is the very essence of the soul. These things cannot be taught, but they can be awakened in the heart of the youth.⁴⁵

Finally, the young person needs to learn about metaphysics, but only to the extent that such learning is prompted by his own feeling and thinking.

Inayat Khan's Way of Knowing

Hazrat Inayat Khan was a Sufi master whose primary means of knowing was the practice of his spiritual path. He explains that through his spiritual discipline he experienced various planes of being above the mental plane, which is the ordinary territory of the human mind. From these experiences, he notes, he gained knowledge and wisdom that is not directly available to human reason but that can only be apprehended through higher states of consciousness.

Inayat Khan describes these states in ascending order, as follows:

- Intuition is an inner knowing that is independent of any outer perception. It is first expressed as feeling and then transformed by the mind into thought. When the mind is tranquil and receptive, wisdom rises from the depths of the heart, a higher level of vibration, and flows into the conscious mind.
- Inspiration comes down from the divine mind into the heart and then on into the consciousness as a stream of wonder and joy. Inspiration comes into the mind already organized into a complete idea.
- Vision is inspiration that comes through a clearness of the inner sight in the form of images.
- Revelation is the experience of God-realization, as the knower becomes one with everything in the universe, and every secret is revealed through the experience of identity of the knower with the known.

Inayat Khan also describes in broad terms the four steps in his spiritual discipline: concentration, the experience of single-mindedness in relation to an object, sound, or sight; contemplation, the experience of single-mindedness in relation to an idea; meditation, an opening to the silent life within and an awakening to the soul; and God-realization, a oneness with the divine mind and with all of reality.

Through his spiritual practice, Inayat Khan experienced these various states and, he reports, learned to gain access to them whenever he entered his meditation. Sirkar Van Stolk, a student of Inayat Khan's as well as his secretary and traveling companion for several years, describes Hazrat Inayat Khan as embodying the highest of these states:

He was an example of all those things he taught: of living in complete harmony with oneself and with one's surroundings; of being conscious of the unity underlying all forms of life . . . even while he talked of everyday things, he remained constantly in that state of highest awareness which the mystics call "God-consciousness." It was this consciousness which stood out most strikingly in the character of Hazrat Inayat Khan. From the moment of meeting him one felt enveloped in his radiance as in a mantle: completely safe, completely understood.⁴⁶