



Celebrating World Religion Day The Universal Worship Service Honoring All Faiths

Sermon on Divine Light
Presented by Murshida Nuria Stephanie Sabato

World Religion Day is celebrated on the third Sunday in January every year and is a reminder of the need for harmony and understanding between religions and faith systems. On this day, communities of different faiths may have the opportunity to come together and listen to each other, as well as celebrate the differences and commonalities that the delicate intermingling of culture and religion brings. There are approximately 4,200 religions around the world.

One of the Activities of the Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan is The Universal Worship Service. Like the intent of World Religion Day, the Ceremony of Universal Worship is a devotional service that offers reverence, homage, and gratitude to the one Source of all light, while symbolically acknowledging all the names and religious forms through which the Light of Truth has shone. The work of the Sufi message is to spread the message of unity among religions. It is not a mission to promote any particular creed or any Church or religion. It is a work of the Universal Worship Service to unite the followers of different religions and faiths in wisdom, so that without having to give up their own religion they may strengthen their faith by focusing light upon their own religion. In this way a greater trust, a greater confidence, will be established in humankind. Therefore, this Universal Worship, also referred to as the Church of All, where all paths that lead to God are mutually respected. The service is a worship, and at the same time it is a training for our mind to learn tolerance the religions of different people.

Show Slide of Altar

The Universal Worship Service may be held in a home, a hall, a church, in nature, or anywhere, for the service is not contingent upon any particular setting. Here we see an example of the Universal Worship altar. There is one main taller candle at the center of the altar, however in a formal setting this light might be hanging sanctuary light. This light represents the Divine Light shining through all religions. From this candle all the other candles on the altar are lit. This signifies that all the various messengers, saints and prophets have received the Divine Light of inspiration from One Source. The different candles which

are lit in the Universal Worship Service represent the various world religions, and they are sequenced in historical chronology.

Looking at the altar, on the left we can see three candles from left to right these candles represent Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. Then again, in the middle, we see the Divine Light Candle. The next three candles, continuing from this center point, moving left to right are three more candles representing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the middle we see in front of the Divine Light Candle a second smaller candle. This candle represents the Divine Light of Truth of all the various faiths. When this candle is lit these worlds are said. 'We kindle the light symbolically representing all those, whether known or unknown to the world, who have held aloft the Light of Truth amidst the darkness of human ignorance.'

So through this first part of the Universal Worship Service, one experiences the unity of Divine Light streaming down from One Source, illuminating all faiths.

The second part of the Universal Worship Service is reading from all the various holy books along a common theme. The selected teachings are intended to illustrate that wisdom and truth are perennial.

The third part of the Universal Worship Service is the Sermon after which there is a musical meditation, and finally the service concludes with the Benediction. Today I have modified a sermon I delivered in the Netherlands a some years ago on Divine Light, and the scriptural readings will be interwoven into the sermon.

Show Logo for The Center for Universal Oneness

I wanted to highlight the symbol of The Center for Universal Oneness because it symbolizes this same ideal. The three concentric rings represent eternity, infinity, and universality. The composite is the unity of oneness with a central light of Divine Love. So, on this World Religion Day we are auspiciously blessed to be able to come together to celebrate this theme of Divine Light.

Back to Stephanie

And “What is light?” In the physical sense, light is bestowed upon the earth from the radiance of the sun. Through the process of photosynthesis plants and animals grow and thrive.

Think of it! What wonderful advancements took place in human history once fire was discovered! This light gave the means not only cook food and warm the cold, but also gave a means to illuminate darkness whether one was traveling by night or entering the darkness of inner space within the walls of the earth.

Within our own psychological make up we have these two aspects. Light and shadow. At first the concepts of dark and light appear as contrasts; however in reality, these seeming polarities are truly two sides of the same coin. For example, when an object faces the source of light that side is illuminated, but what happens to the other side? It is shadowed in darkness.

A Carl Jung said: 'Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.' Or we could also say, 'If we don't deal with our 'shadow' it will return to us as our fate.'

The question is how to bring those things, hidden thoughts, feelings, prejudices, from the shadows into the light? How does one illuminate this darkness so that all aspects of life, and ourselves, are brought into the light of revelation and realization? The light of revelation that develops in us the warmth of heart, brilliance of character, and a wholesome personality, which can be likened to the rays of the sun giving light and warmth to all those who come in contact with our atmosphere.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin taught, "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire."

Through our connection to this Divine Light, we move towards inner illumination; a radiance that lights up the shadows within our own hearts and minds, transforming us into beacons of light and love.

As it is taught in Hindu scriptures,

“As the sun, which helps all eyes to see, is not affected by the blemishes of the eyes or of the external things revealed by it, so also the one Atman [soul], dwelling in all beings, is never contaminated by the misery of the world, being outside it.”

This scripture reminds us that despite our human shortcomings the light of our soul is not contaminated; however, it is up to us to find a means to bring that light into the world. So why does this process of dealing with the darkness of the world, and within us frighten us at times? Do we need to be afraid, as we were as children fearful of the night of what might lurk under our bed or hide in the closet? To this I say, “No!”. And why do I say, “No!”? Because the fear perpetuates a distorted perception of the Reality of our True Self preventing the light of Atman, the Soul, to shine out into the world. It is our responsibility, our duty to bring this light forward and offer it to the world.

From Buddhist Scriptures:

“Hold fast to the truth as a lamp that shines in the darkness. Seek salvation in the truth alone.”

Shakespeare wrote, “To Thine own self be true.” This self can only be seen in the Light of Truth. With an open, non-judgmental mind turned towards curiosity with an aim toward wholeness we can take up the attitude of uncovering and discovering the precious secret treasure of that Divine Light hidden in every being and hidden within our very soul.

The Zoroastrian Scriptures illustrates this point in the verse that reads:

“What shall Thou, O God, bestow upon us through Thy spiritual lights? What is the bliss attainable through truth and purity which has been promised to all?”

We can consciously bring to light the darkness of our own calamities seeing these calamities as but dust on the lantern our very hearts that hold the Divine Light. Let us be courageous crusaders of the truth hidden within our own beings so that our soul’s purpose, may be fully realized.

The Zoroastrian Scriptures further speaks to this:

“Show me O, Almighty, the best path, so that I may decide which path is in accord with Asha [Asha meaning the Fire of the Agent of Truth]. Reveal to me through good mind the recompense that befalls me, so that I may feel exalted with joy. Make me aware of everything, O Mazda Ahura, which has happened in the past or may happen in future.”

Asha, The Fire of the Agent of Truth, the Truth lies within the legacy of all the world’s religions. This truth provides us with a map that God’s messengers have given to us by their example – the way in which they lived their lives, their challenges to giving birth the Message of their time, their methods, and their spiritual practice. The various faith systems provide blessed tools for reflection and different perspectives for unmasking the hoax of our own personalities and the obstacles to our happiness and well-being. As the Zoroastrian scripture teaches, *‘Reveal to me through good mind the recompense that befalls me, so that I may feel exalted with joy.’*

The Old Testament states:

For you will light my lamp, Yahweh. My God will light up my darkness.

The New Testament instructs us:

You are the light of the world.

So let your light shine before all, that they may see your good works.

In the Quran we read:

Allah [the Arabic word for God] is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of God's light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star...

May each of us discover our shining star!

And from the Sayings of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, the founder of the Sufi Message and the Universal Worship Service.

Thy light hath illuminated the dark chambers of my mind;
Thy love is rooted in the depths of my heart;
Thine own eyes are the light of my soul;
Thy power worketh behind my action;
Thy peace alone is my life's repose;
Thy will is behind my every impulse;
Thy voice is audible in the words I speak;
Thine own image is my countenance.
My body is but a cover over Thy soul;
My life is Thy very breath, my Beloved [My God], and
My self is Thine own being.

We have within our reach all the grace, inspiration, and illumination of all the Masters, Saints, Prophets, and we can draw the beauty and wisdom from all religious and spiritual traditions. We have a rich kaleidoscope of wisdom through which we can reclaim and rejoin with our own Divine Inheritance in Light.

Let us call to mind that as the sun reaches its zenith it cast not a shadow. Through mindfulness in actions, speech, thoughts, and feelings we can grow in equanimity free from passion, aggression, and prejudice. We can rise to the zenith of our Divine Inheritance as well as the deepest part within our very Self so that our life's purpose, which is the discovering of the illumination of our inner star. May this discovery bring us to communion with all of creation so that we, and all others, may become a rich constellation of light illuminating our shared humanity.

Today I have for our Musical Meditation a poem by the great 13th Century Sufi mystic poet, Jelaluddin Rumi. The title of the poem is, Didn't I Tell You. Rumi's intention in the words of the poem is God speaking to us. So, let the words wash over you as such. The music and voice possess a rhythmic certainty, and the changing landscapes move from shadow into light.

After the music, Kyle if you will return to me, I may close my portion of this service with the Benediction of the Universal Worship.

Play Musical Meditation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwLoi1OdrQs&list=RDLVeKrB6m6MaBk&index=2>.

Benediction

May the blessings of God rest upon you, May God's peace abide with you,
May God's Presence Illuminate your hearts, Now and Forevermore.