

A Story About
The Living Altar of the Universal Worship Service

...all forms of worship or belief should draw man closer to God...

Volume II: The mysticism of Music, Sound and Word

There are many ways and means to strive toward this goal.

Meeting Ground of the Divine Mind

...the experience of individuals, the thoughts, feelings and knowledge of individuals and the experience of nations, of races, throughout all ages and periods of history, have not belonged only to individuals, not even to the multitude, to the nations, the races, but have always gone back till they came to that depth where they were assimilated with what is called the Divine Mind.

Extracted from "The Interconnectedness of All Things", Murshida Nuria Stephanie Sabato, January 21, 2024

The Universal Worship

The religious activity of the Sufi Movement is called the Universal Worship, or the Church of All. Why is it so named? Because it contains all different ways of worship and all churches. *It is the meeting ground of the Divine mind.*

The Universal Worship which has been organized in the Sufi Movement was the hope of all prophets, the prayer and desire of all great souls: that the light given in all the different forms such as the Buddhist scriptures, the Qur'an, the Bible or the teachings of Krishna or Zarathustra should be known by everyone.

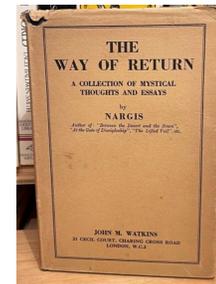
The work of the Sufi Message is to spread the unity of religion.

May the message of God reach far and wide.

The Unity of Religious ideals, Part VI

The Origin of the Universal Worship

An Early Mureed: Nargis Jessie Dowland, 1866 - 1953,
Kuan Yin Pujos-Michel, Banff



From 1921–1933 she managed the impressive Polygon House Hotel where it is believed she first came to meet Inayat Khan on one of his lecture tours. We know that she was initiated into the Sufi Order/Sufi Movement in 1919 (at the age of 53) by Inayat Khan, who became her beloved Murshid. He later named her a Khalifa and National Representative of the Sufi Movement in England, an honour she held from 1921 to 1933. Inayat Khan also gave her the Persian name Nargis, meaning

“inspired soul whose heart is focused on the Spirit of Guidance”

Excerpts from Heart to Heart, Spring 2022

Nargis worked here & some segue research.

The Polygon development in Southampton was begun in August 1768. It was the focus of a speculative development by the architect and builder, Jacob Leroux, and was designed on a grand scale to rival anything in Bath. Bankruptcy and the lack of suitable tenants meant that the development was abandoned and the land sold off. At the end of the 19th century the surviving houses were converted into the building known as the Polygon Hotel.

Inayat Khan may have lectured here.
1921

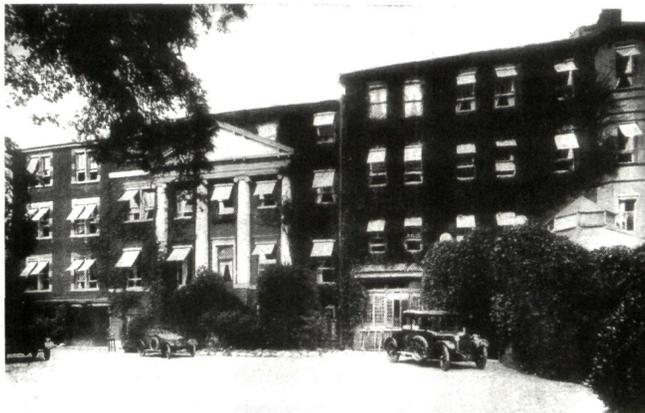


Fig. 3 Exterior of the Polygon 1934

THE POLYGON, SOUTHAMPTON - RECENT FIELDWORK By STUART ROBERTSON
Proc. Hampshire EM Club Archaeol. Soc. 56, 2001, 192-201 (Hampshire Studies 2001)

First Universal Worship at
35 Tregunter Road in London, UK.



Nargis

Apart from her energetic support of Inayat Khan and the fledgling Order in England, Nargis' special contribution were most evident in two...areas: in the genesis of the Universal Worship service and in publication efforts.

From Nargis' notebook in 1921, "Once when Murshid was standing with Miss Dowland before a dilapidated old Church, (she) said to him, "Oh Murshid, shouldn't we buy this and rebuild it for the Sufis?" Murshid answered, "Never, never, never will Murshid found a Church." A week later Murshid dictated to her at her flat in Southampton the Service of the Universal Worship. It was then and there that the Church of All came into existence. Excerpted from *The Path of the Seeker Books 1 & 2*, Suluk Press, Original Texts, Vol. 2, Sayings, Nekbakht Foundation.

Sharif Munawwir Graham, in his article "The First Universal Worship Service", tells us that the service was held at the home of Gladys I. Lloyd on Saturday May 7, 1921.

The First Universal Worship Service

Shabaz E.A.Mitchell, a professional journalist from Southampton describes the service:

“Murshid stands facing his mureeds and Miss Dowland, the National Representative, on his left hand begins to read the prayers in a calm, strong voice. As she reads, Murshid, with closed eyes makes gently and with deliberation the appropriate gestures, his movements being watched by all with indescribable emotion. The prayers themselves are the most comprehensive we have ever listened to; they lift the thoughts to things above and turn them on things beneath.”

Graham adds, *“The fact that Murshid himself performed the gestures as Nargis Dowland recited the prayers shows that he felt the movements were most important.”* Murshid commented, *“the body of the movement is formed today.”*

Excerpted from The Path of the Seeker Books 1 & 2, Suluk Press, Original Texts, Vol. 2, Sayings, Nektakht Foundation.

Shabaz Mitchell described the scene of the first Universal Worship

One is invited into the room on the first floor. As the door opens one's eyes first catch sight of a lighted candle, and the smoke of burning incense upon an improvised altar. . . The prayers...speak of the greatness, the power, the beauty, the all-pervadingness of God, also of His Messengers, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and 'those whose names are unknown.' . . .

We hold our breath, realizing it to be a moment of profound significance. . . And when the little company disperses to pass into the London night, the thought in one's mind is that there has just been planted a tiny seed, which shall one day spring up into a great tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations.

From theuniversalworship.org website

Hazrat Inayat Khan Collective Interview, August 8, 1926

“I would like today to explain the meaning of the different gestures we make in our elevation service. For every movement has a meaning. It must be understood that a prayer is not offered to God in order to give Him the pleasure, but the prayer is offered to God in order to lift our own soul... If the prayer is only in the feeling, it is not yet expressed; If the prayer is put in the thought, then it has gone one step further in expression. When the prayer is in words, it has taken two steps in expression. If the prayer is in movements, then it has taken three steps... that makes the prayer expressed fully.”



Praise be to thee, most supreme God, omnipotent,
omnipresent, all pervading, the only being.....

...Pour upon us thy love and thy light...

...Draw us closer to Thee every moment of our life until in us be reflected thy grace, thy glory, thy wisdom, thy joy and thy peace.



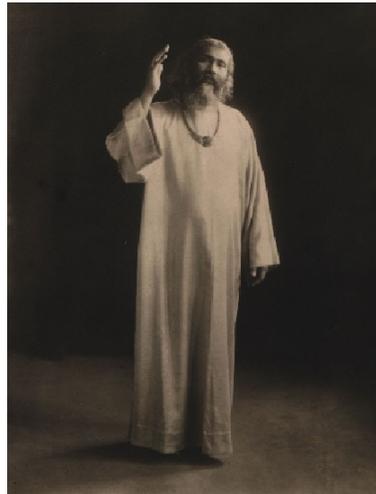
The Inayat Khan Family



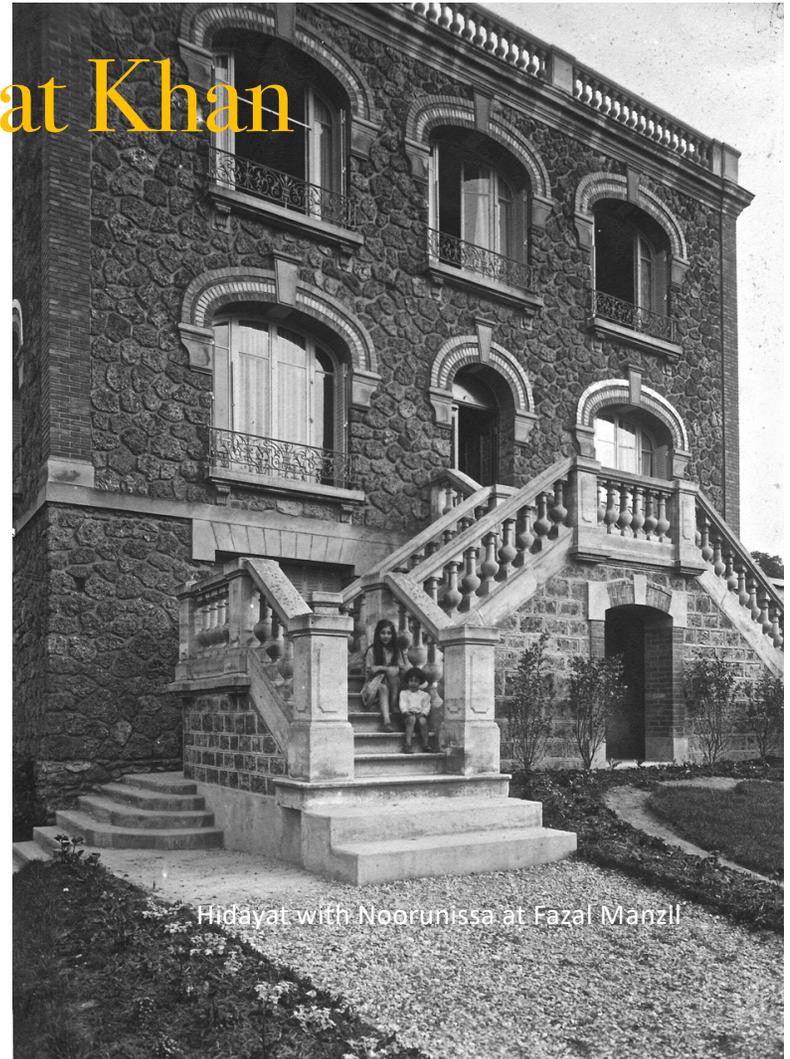
Hidayat Inayat Khan



Hidayat as a boy.



Hidayat was 9 years old when his father died in India.



Hidayat with Noorunissa at Fazal Manzil

Murshid Hidayat at Lake O'Hara



Murshid Hidayat attended every annual Lake O'Hara retreat from 1981 to 2022.
Aziza also started accompanying him later in the 1980s.

Lake O'Hara – an era of study & exploration



Hidayat was adamant about preserving the authentic legacy of his father but encouraged us to explore and experiment with the *expression* of the Sufi message.



Murshid Hidayat's Recollection



While attending a Lake O'Hara Retreat In the early 1980s, Hidayat told us of a recollection he had of his father.

Inayat Khan told Hidayat that he imagined a "pyramid" solidifying over the Universal Worship altar during the service. In his lifetime Inayat never had the chance to explore this vision.

Hidayat asked us to explore what this could possibly have meant.

Octahedron shape, naturally formed in fluorite and diamonds

Inayat Khan on Symbolism

*The wise have given lessons to the world in different forms suited to the evolution of the people at a particular time. And the first and most original form of education that the wise gave to the world has been **symbolical**. This method of teaching has been valued in all ages and will always have its importance.*

That is not beauty which is not veiled. In the veiling and unveiling of beauty is the purpose of life. Beauty is that which is always out of reach. You see it and you do not see it, You touch it and you cannot touch it. It is seen and yet veiled, it is known and yet unknown.

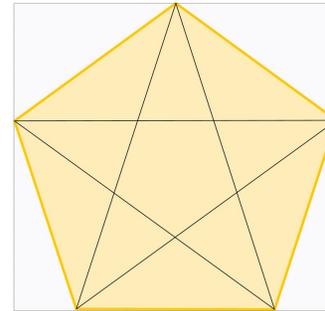
*And therefore words are often inadequate to express the beauty of Truth. Therefore, **symbolism** is adopted by the wise.*

Volume XIII – The Gathas part III, Nakshi Bandi: Symbology

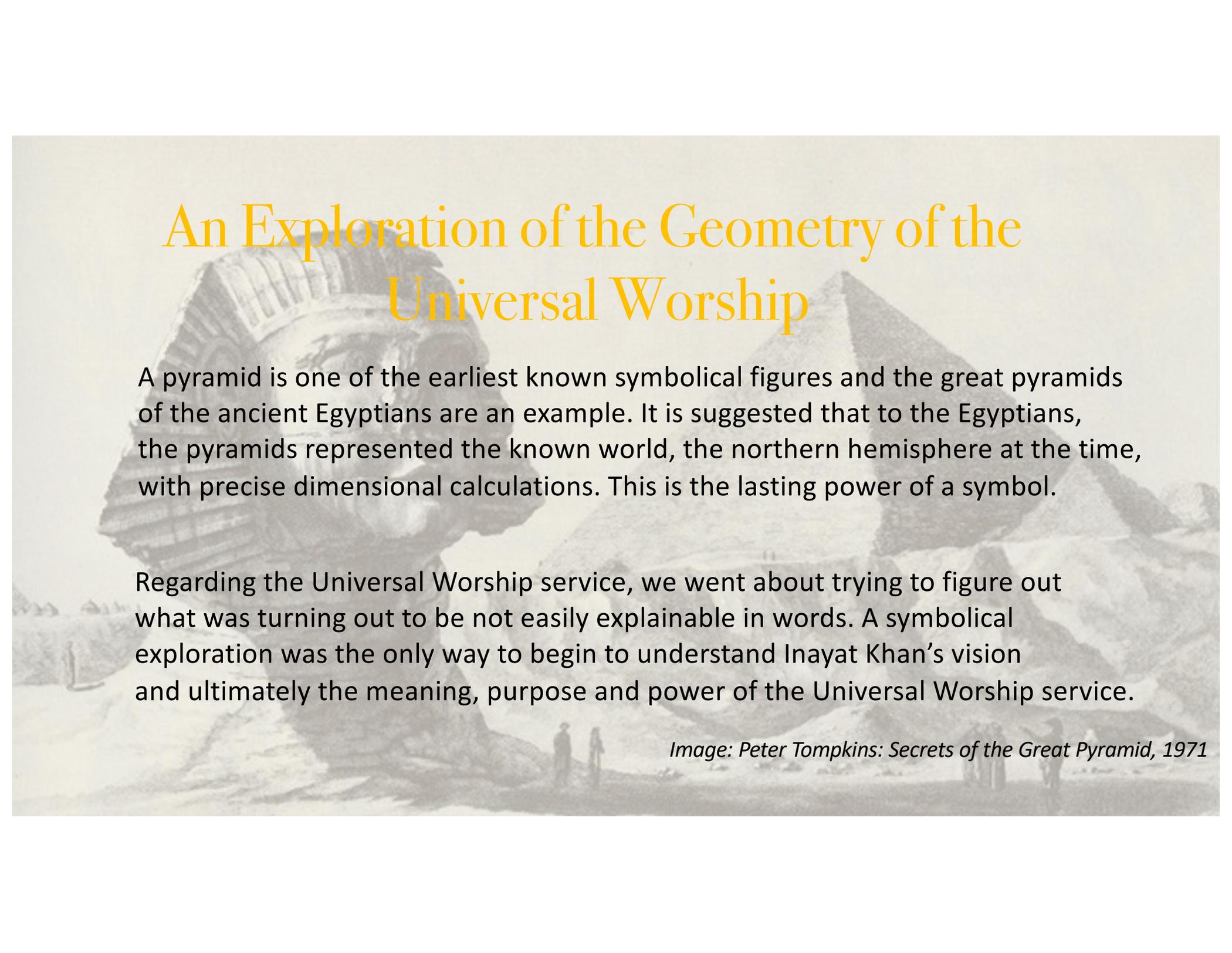
The mysticism behind a symbol

Inayat Khan on Geometry

Geometry is an important means to express symbolism. Inayat Khan was particularly intrigued by the pentagram which is reflected in the screens of his dargah.



Hidayat got quite excited at the prospect of pursuing a geometrical symbolism of the Universal Worship



An Exploration of the Geometry of the Universal Worship

A pyramid is one of the earliest known symbolical figures and the great pyramids of the ancient Egyptians are an example. It is suggested that to the Egyptians, the pyramids represented the known world, the northern hemisphere at the time, with precise dimensional calculations. This is the lasting power of a symbol.

Regarding the Universal Worship service, we went about trying to figure out what was turning out to be not easily explainable in words. A symbolical exploration was the only way to begin to understand Inayat Khan's vision and ultimately the meaning, purpose and power of the Universal Worship service.

Image: Peter Tompkins: Secrets of the Great Pyramid, 1971



A SEARCH INTO THE MEANING OF THE SERVICE OF THE
UNIVERSAL WORSHIP

A Geometric Pursuit into its Form and Symbolism

David Murray
August 2000

In 1985, we started the exploration of a sacred geometry to help us understand the deep spiritual significance and mysticism of the Universal Worship.

August 25, 1985

The geometry of the form of the Universal Worship was spoken of and understood by Hazarat Inayat Khan, yet no document from the time of his life exists to describe, in detail, the geometric symbolism of this service.

This study was encouraged and tutored by Hidayat Inayat Khan so that all Sufis could benefit from the guidance and inspiration of Hazarat Inayat Khan regarding the form of the Universal Worship.

This paper is a personal search for meaning and should not be seen as a manual for conducting the service, which is well documented elsewhere.

Credit is due to the scholarly text, "The Sense of Unity, A Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture" by Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar for guidance in the areas of traditional geometry, symbolism and mathematics.

'Understanding' is an evolving process, a continual unveiling. This paper represents a certain understanding at a certain time.

The style of the pursuit is simple, deliberately so, to allow for the greatest personal interpretation. Symbolism is a language with tremendous communication potential. I hope that some of those who read this will feel the urge to comment. I welcome this.

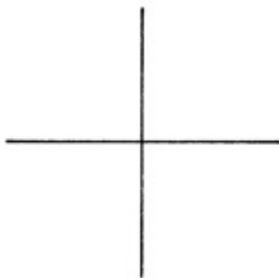
David Murray
9706 85 Avenue,
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada T6E 2J4

The Geometrical Evolution



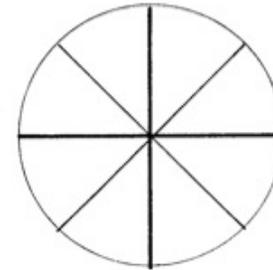
The dot is the most important of all figures,
for every figure is the extension of the dot.
It is the beginning. It is the One and All.

Ya Wahid – the one present in the many,
Vision of infinity in a grain of sand,
From one source emerging diversity

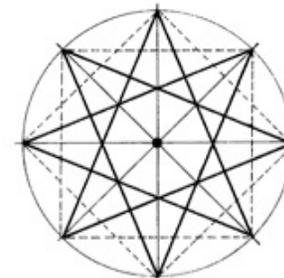


From the dot comes the line. From the line
comes the cross.
The vertical line represents Divine aspiration.
The horizontal line represents material manifestation.

Ya Wasi – ever expanding and embracing



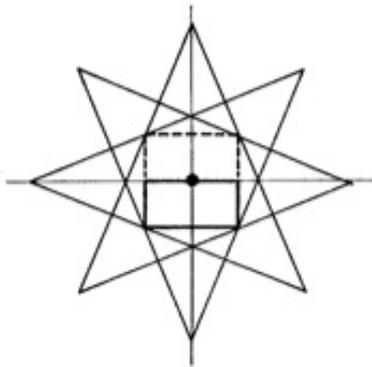
From the line and cross come the circle.
The circle symbolizes the unity of the Divine
and the material.
It symbolizes motion, circular and spiral, in and out,
the breath of life.



From the dot and circle, come the Divine geometries,
the mandalas. The 8-pointed star is derived from two
squares set at an angle to each other, implying revolution
and setting this symbol into dynamic motion.
It corresponds to the musical scale of 8 notes.
It represents music as the universal language.

The mandala is a 'vehicle' on which the ceremony of the
Universal Worship can travel to its destination.

The forming of a crystal

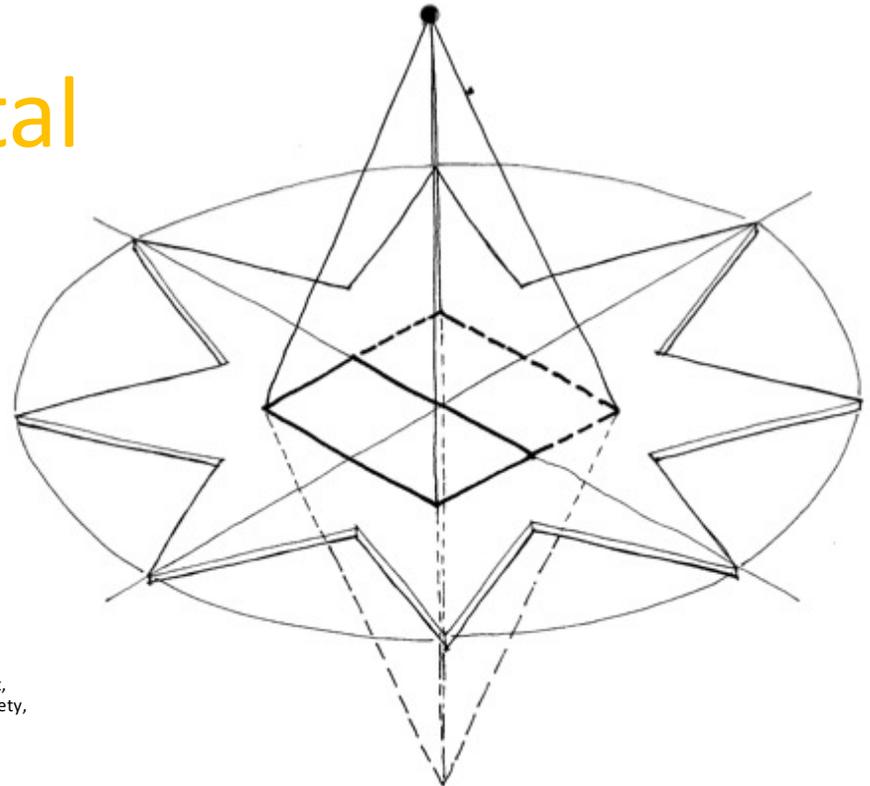


A clear crystal refracts light, transforming white light, representing unity, into the rainbow, representing variety, the human condition.

Inside the 8-pointed star can be found a square, representing the altar of the Universal Worship.

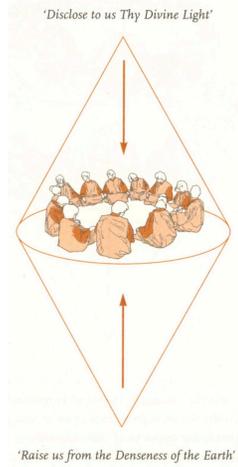
The vertical and horizontal lines bisect the square, symbolizing the known and unknown, the seen and the unseen.

The centre of the square, the dot, represents the Divine at the centre of all things.



When projected into the third dimension, The dot (Divine Source) is located above the square (the altar). Joining the dot to the corners of the square creates a pyramid. The square plane represents man. The pyramid represents the relationship between God and man. The dotted back half of the square represents the unseen and the bottom pyramid, a reflection of the one above, represents the unknown.

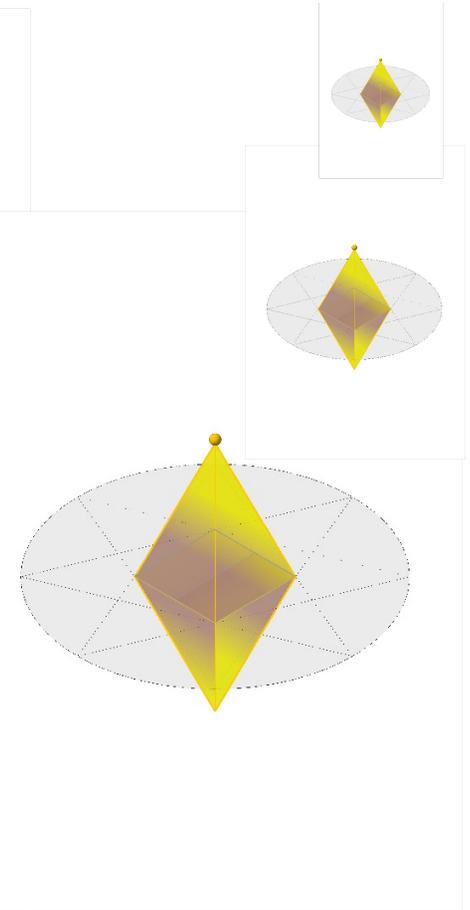
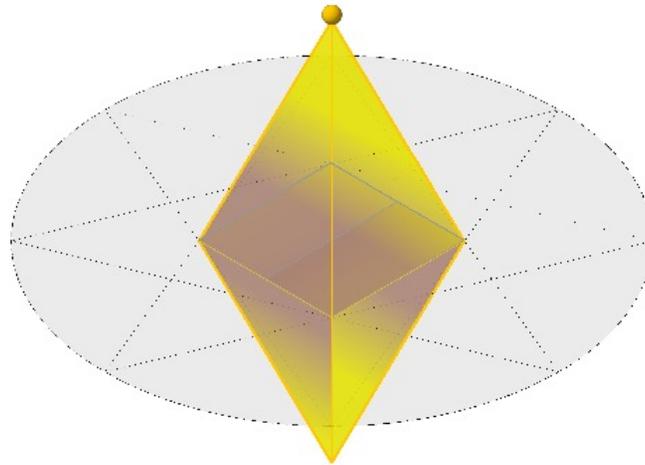
A crystal has been formed encompassing all aspects of the Divine and material. This crystal represents the power of transformation. It transforms single white light to the spectrum and vice versa. Thus it is the symbol by which we can understand the One in All and All in One.



Zikar



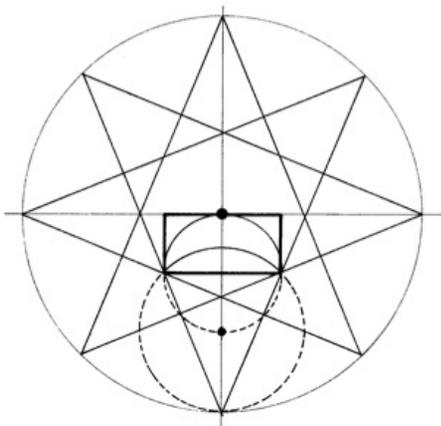
A pyramidal octahedron crystal
solidifying around the altar



The Universal Worship
A vehicle on the journey of Divine realization

Some Hidayat-inspired geometrical explorations

It is amazing that, without any effort, the geometry of the Universal Worship evolved exactly as Inayat Khan taught the practice.

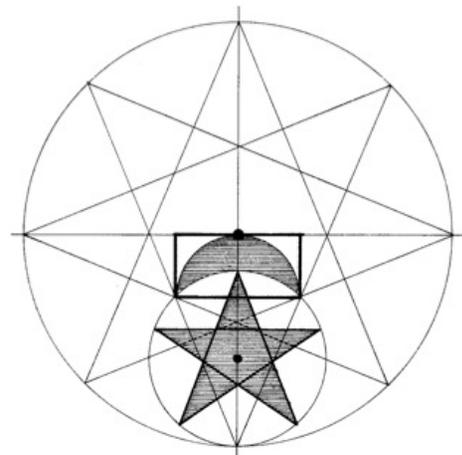


The altar for the Universal Worship is the half square at the centre of the mandala.

On the surface of the altar is located a crescent moon shape, symbolizing both the receptacle and the reflection.

It is within this crescent that the candles representing the world religions are placed. The candle representing the Divine Light is located at the back of the altar under the symbolic dot.

The crescent moon is created by the intersection of two circles relating to the geometry of the square and the circle of the mandala.



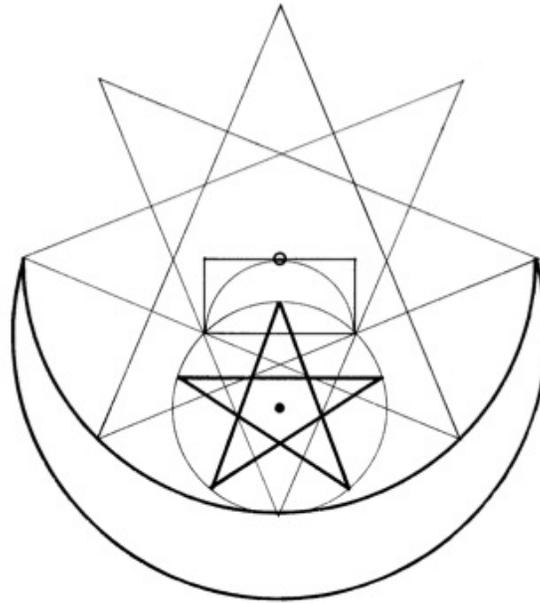
As the service of the Universal Worship proceeds, the pyramid over the altar becomes more solid, the unity of God and man closer to realization.

In front of the altar, described by the inner circle of the crescent, is a 5-star mandala, the symbol of illumination and the symbol of man.

As the pyramid becomes more solid, the centre point of the 5-point star, the heart of man, becomes a receptor point for the energy of the divine realization. See next page .

This point of reception is the location of the blessing at the culmination of the service. The star, symbolizing man with outstretched arms, also represents the blessing.

The solidification of the pyramid over the altar coincides with the giving of the blessing - the instantaneous link between man and God.

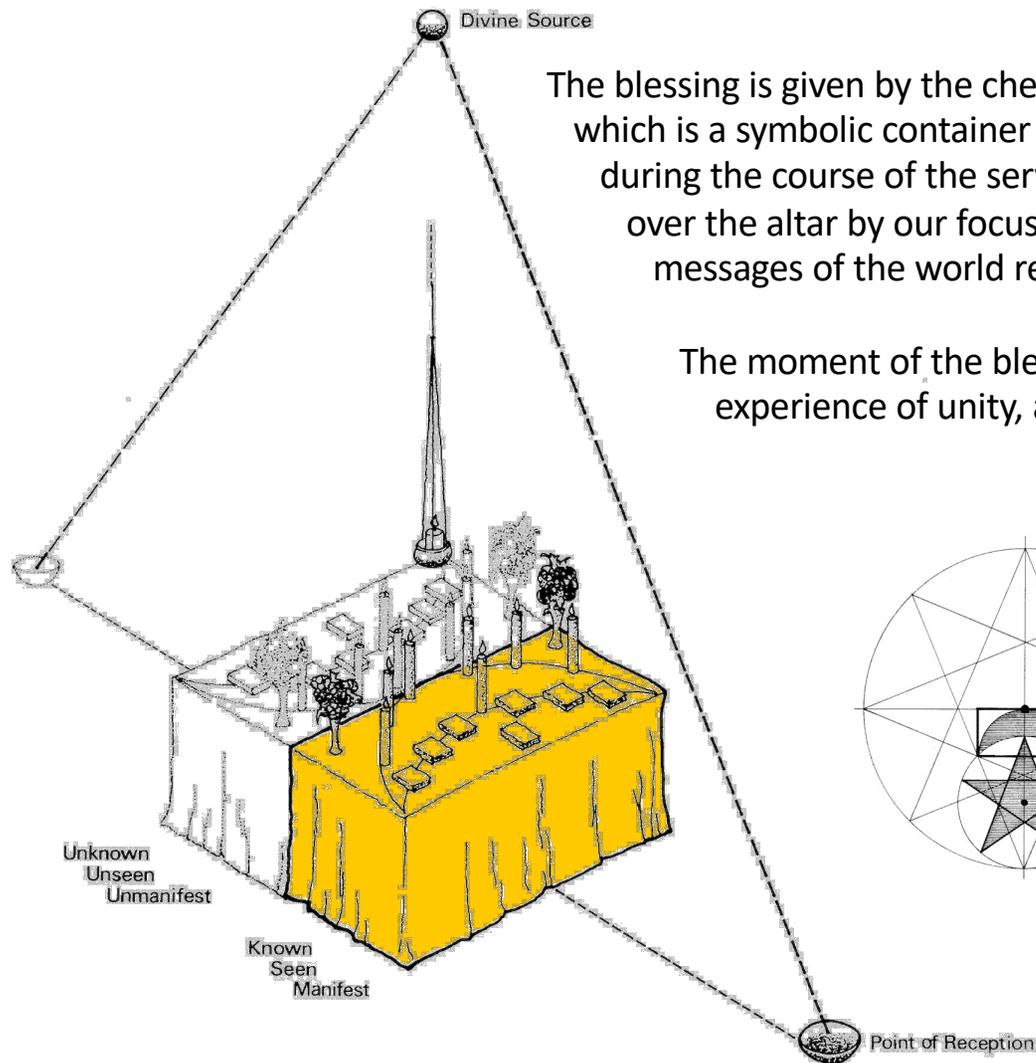


A large crescent shape is formed using the mandala circle as the inside circle of the crescent. In the service of the Universal Worship, the crescent represents those who are attending, the receivers of the Divine illumination, as represented by the 5-pointed star, the point of the blessing as transmitted by an attending cherag.

The cherag giving the blessing is the messenger of the time, representing the heart of man in direct contact with the Divine.

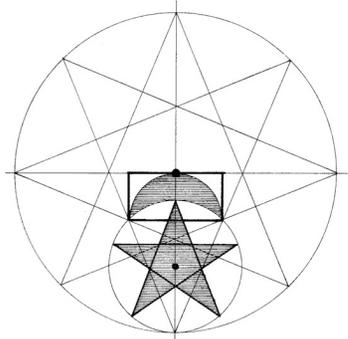
Hence the symbol of the star in the crescent moon, when understood how derived, is a significant symbol of the Universal Worship. The practice of all religions as one has the power of Divine realization.

The Universal Worship is one such form and to the Sufi, is a symbol of Sufism itself.

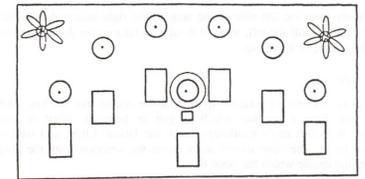


The blessing is given by the cherag at the point of reception, which is a symbolic container of light that has manifested during the course of the service, just as the crystal has solidified over the altar by our focus on and attention to the unifying messages of the world religions.

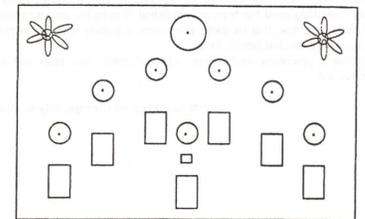
The moment of the blessing is a transformative experience of unity, a Divine experience.



The Universal Worship Guidebook
Sufi Movement International 1995



Altar plan
(hanging Divine Light)



Altar plan
(Divine Light placed on the altar)

The Living Altar at Lake O'Hara

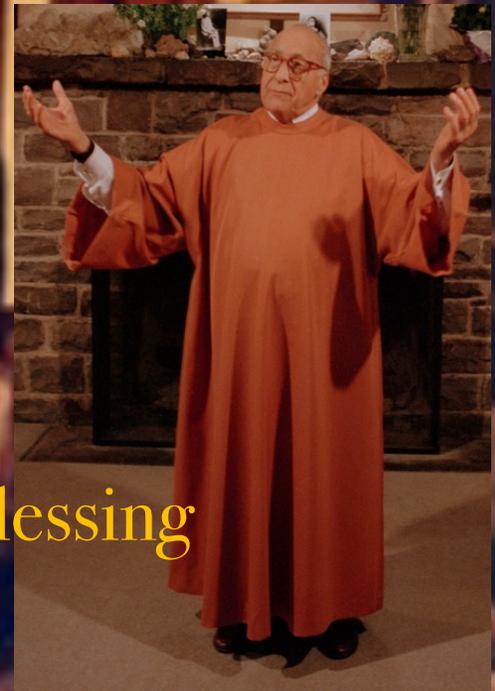
The symbolic geometry informed the layout of the service,
the crescent moon of the human altar
and the reflective crescent formation of the audience,
forming a continuous and inclusive circle.



Each text and each candle, representing the world's religious traditions, is represented by a person, bringing life to the light and message of the religious traditions.

The Living Altar

The message of unity culminates with the blessing
at the conclusion of the service.



A Living Altar in Cuba in 2009



In the caves of Cuba, a group of sufis joined with the shaman Panchito and his daughter Idalis for a tobacco ceremony and prayers. Here in the depths of the earth, where the indigenous people had hidden from the Spaniards' dark genocide, they joined in prayer with one of the last living Indian elders in the country.

Recalled by Karim Joe Clare and Sufia Carol Sill.

An impromptu Universal Worship was held in the cave. Different people held a candle for each major world religion. There was a great resonance with one of the early intensions of the Universal Worship to harmonize the nations of the world.

An English yogi held the Hindu candle.

A woman from China carried the Buddhist light.

An Afro-Cuban woman, a Jewish man and a young Cuban Christian woman with a Canadian sufi held the light for Islam.

The light of Truth was held by a Cuban man,
An Argentinian yoga teacher held the light of God.

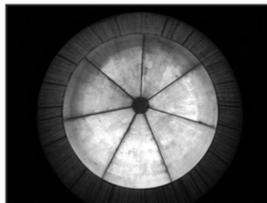
After the ceremony, they left a cigar burning beside a candle on a ledge in the cave and a little cassava offering before they climbed back up into the sunlight.

The Living Altar Service



Ecuador

Also:
Summer School
1993



North West Camp 2000
With Rani

The Living Altar



Photo: Fazalunissa Carole Harmon

1917-2016

We shared a lot of joy and good times as we explored the Sufi Message with Hidayat, Aziza and friends.

