

# Ten Sufi thoughts on climate change

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*“Q. Can coming volcanic eruptions and earthquakes and disasters in nature be felt by sensitive people in advance? A. Yes, there is an action and reaction, the action of nature upon people, and the action of people upon nature. This storm and wind has a certain effect upon us, in our word and speech and action. But this is also caused in some way as a re- action of the conditions of people. And therefore all wars and storms and floods and volcanic eruptions, very often they are caused by human beings, by the action or attitude or condition of humanity in general.”* Hazrat Inayat Khan

The 10 Sufi thoughts are part of the core teachings of the Inayatiyya. They were given by Hazrat Inayat Khan in the beginning of the 20th century.

The comments are mine. They try to describe the application of these principles to a climatological crisis, whose extent could barely be foreseen one century ago.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one God, the eternal, the only being; none else exists save God.”*

Climate change is man-made. Hazrat Inayat Khan told us this a hundred years ago; science proves it now. Through our economic development we have changed the earth system. The living environment that our planet will offer over the next tens of thousands of years will be at least very different, and almost certainly a lot less favourable to human life.

The historic period called Holocene, starting 10,000 years ago with Zarathustra teaching mankind agriculture as a God-pleasing way of living, comes to an end. Time appears to be accelerating as human activities disrupt the rhythm of so many natural systems.

Geologists call the new period Anthropocene. New is the fact that we humans don't just change regional environments but have developed the power to disturb the functioning of the earth as a complex and dynamic whole (described as Gaia by James Lovelock).

It is not some old God punishing us with floods and droughts and earthquakes. It is us! Mankind, especially the inhabitants of the western world with their insatiable appetite for consumption.

„The whole earth“, „all mankind“. These terms, having been ideas for many centuries, become a physical reality now. In ten or twenty years our world will be Indo-Sino-American-Eurocentric. The average per capita production of CO<sub>2</sub> of the Chinese is climbing fast towards that of the Europeans. The old division between north and south is gradually disappearing.

And for the new age called Anthropocene, Hazrat Inayat Khan invites mankind to conceive of a new concept of God as a being that works through all forms of the universe, a being within and without, both seen and unseen.

We live in a time where the old ideal of mankind has come to an end. We have discovered that our planet is not able to sustain the global economic development that we envisioned. We consume natural resources at a level that would need 4 Planet Earths.

Mankind stands there naked, lost, without an ideal. The vision of utopia based on the free flow of capital was shattered on the rocks of physical truth and without ideals we are in danger of falling back into old ideologies of nations, religions, family ties.

During the last two or three hundred years, nature was considered to be a commodity, so-called resources available to be used for the happiness of man. Mankind felt free to take whatever it wanted from its “environment” and to dump whatever waste it created. Spirituality had to do with inner worlds, with churches and Sundays; often as a superficial practice rather than deep engagement with the divine. On top of this, more and more humans dropped spirituality altogether, seeing it as irrelevant to attaining the envisioned utopia.

And then Hazrat Inayat Khan declared that the time has come for a renewal of our ideal: mankind discovering that all of its activities are embedded in the One.

**Conclusion:** The first response of our Inayatiyya to climate change is to incorporate and present the possibility of a new ideal which can nourish our bodies, hearts and souls: mankind integrated within the greater whole.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one Master, the guiding spirit of all souls, who constantly leads followers toward the light.”*

Why did we go so far destroying our world? Because we follow the rules and necessities of so-called ‘free market economics’ or capitalism, the ruling world-wide vision. The master of global business is the one that achieves the maximum of material result with the minimum of effort. With this simplistic goal, man developed in the last fifty years a power that literally moves mountains. By the will of man, the whole world is being transformed all the way down to the geological level.

This ‘mastery’ was able to be developed by the means of the powerful weapons of willpower and rationality. Modern man is able to distance himself from the environment. He has developed the capacity of not feeling or being emotionally involved. Everything has to be observed and measured “objectively” (i.e. from outside Planet Earth as if we were not an integral part of that greater whole). Hence the outside world is considered to be the real. The subjective world the unreal.

We have consequently renounced our sensibility and responsiveness to the processes of nature. We have lost contact with soil and earth, and forgotten our deep connectedness and (inter)dependency.

All those who tried to conserve their belonging to a special place, community, environment, way of life, profession or religion were considered reactionaries. In order to become one world we had to drop any difference, any diversity.

The big advantage was the freedom we gained in this way. We dropped the bonds that tied us to our surrounding. This is the ‘mastery’ gained in the Holocene.

And now we discover that with all the power we have developed, we have not just ruined much of our planet, but also changed its rhythms and structure. We are on the way to losing the world that sustained us.

The fear and the madness as the result of this discovery take on different faces:

- Elites in power try to ignore the facts and pretend everything is fine; Just another challenge that will be mastered by global capitalism.
- Partly by willfully destroying the evidence of the catastrophic state we put ourselves into.

- Some of the richest have started investing in spaceships that would allow some humans to perhaps live a human life after leaving planet Earth.
- As some regions become uninhabitable because of climatic or economic or humanitarian reasons, the victims start moving, trying to reach as refugees the richer parts of the world.
- The inhabitants of the more well-to-do regions try to prevent an invasion and fall back into old nationalistic ideologies, as if any part of the world could be exempted from the change of the Earth's rhythms.
- Some have come to the conclusion that mankind has lost its right to live on this planet and that we deserve to die out.

The Sufi Message as brought by Hazrat Inayat Khan offers another solution. We have to wake up from the illusion of an ideal that turned out to be a delusion. We have to proceed in the enlargement of our vision.

This means to be proud of our mastery and of the autonomy we gained. And at the same time to start listening to the processes that dominate life on our planet. We have to acknowledge that we cannot be imagined as free beings in the sense of completely independent from any bonds. The Anthropocene shows without any doubt how deeply we are related to the natural processes. Our activities have immediate impact on our planetary surroundings, which in turn have an immediate impact on us.

With the word „immediate“ is meant a physical bodily impact. With the word „listening“ is meant, that we take seriously our senses of hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, touching.

Only if we start listening, will we be told how to survive in a world of changing climates. If we enlarge our awareness, we will hear the voice of guidance coming from all things, without and within.

The message of Hazrat Inayat Khan is that the next step lies in the combination of mastery and responsiveness.

**Conclusion:** The 2nd response of the Inayatiyya to climate change is to help people to start listening to their inner voice and to find an equilibrium between mastery and guidance.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one holy book, the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader.”*

The surprising thing about climate change is that it cannot be understood without understanding man. The wide range of predictions about global warming in the 21st century is partly due to scientific uncertainties but largely due to the fact that we don't know how mankind will behave.

This is revolutionary! Our modern culture is based on a sharp division between man and nature. Through this thought we appear to dominate nature. As a consequence of this delusion, we have overlooked our ignorance about the Earth. We have only recorded a small proportion of species on Earth and we remain largely ignorant about the composition of soils and the multitude of interconnected/interdependent processes upon which all life forms depend.

Of course some mighty groups don't give up the vision of subduing the Earth. Geoengineering is the keyword for them. One can only hope that these people will wake up from illusion soon, before making things worse.

Unwillingly, we have brought ourselves to a point of surrender. The only way to deal with the new unpredictable situation is to admit that we don't know. So the result of desecrating nature is that she gains a new sacredness in the sense of an unknown mystery that maybe should not be touched, because we don't know the results. We thought that we are the masters of the universe and find out that the only sensible option towards the powers of nature is humility (a word whose root is humus, the Latin for earth or ground).

Our planet is part of a continuously evolving Universe; a myriad of interconnected/interdependent cycles and processes including the Earth's core, rocks, oceans and soils, the atmosphere and all of 'outer space' - the moon, the sun, the other planets and stars.

This whole is more than the parts. We are used to reducing life to the parts involved and through these analytic methods we have lost the sense of both wholeness and holiness. And now this holiness returns through the back door. We are confronted with an earth system that includes all, including ourselves. Mankind developed a tremendous power to change nature, but we have very few insights into the interaction of the different bodies and forces. No other living being can influence the processes of nature as much as man, but we will never be able to dominate these complex systems because we are just a small part of them.

A completely new perspective of nature is being born. Hazrat Inayat Khan was ridiculed for saying that the earth is the centre of the universe. Now we can slowly understand his statement. In the Anthropocene we have to drop the merely rational and „scientific“ way of looking at Planet Earth from outer space. The Earth was considered to be one planet out of many in the endless universe. This point of view brought us on the verge of losing our Earth. We are discovering that the Earth is our centre, if not the centre of all.

Complementary to the existing forms, science must be widened to incorporate investigations into the nature of transformation. Birth, death, growth, life, consciousness, [?corruption?] are to be the metamorphic phenomena to study closely.

The etymology of the word „nature“ comprises aspects of

- origin,
- generation,
- begetting,
- proceedings.

These aspects cannot be investigated from outer space. In them the life of the scientist intermingles with the life of the studied objects as living beings with a soul.

Thus reading the book of nature becomes a source of enlightenment because by doing so the walls between man and world are being dissolved.

Attachment becomes a legitimate place complementary to detachment.

**Conclusion:** The 3rd response of the Inayatiyya is to understand that both we ourselves and our surrounding world belong to the same One Nature.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one religion, the unswerving progress in the right direction toward the ideal, which fulfils the life’s purpose of every soul.”*

In no period of human evolution has the concept of religion become more real than in the now starting Anthropocene. The old understanding of religion was the following of a cult that would bring us to heaven after death. The award for refraining from certain actions and things would be waiting for us in the hereafter.

After dropping religion altogether, mankind developed pseudo religions like communism and capitalism, telling us that hardships and injustice are necessary for us humans to reach a glorious future with happiness for everybody. The suffering of the non-human nature kingdoms was not even being considered, as these and had no voice and did not complain.

Today nature has started „complaining“. This phenomenon is termed pandemics, biodiversity loss and climate change. From a background that could be taken for granted (loving mother Earth), nature became our counterpart, giving us a hard time.

If we don’t want to divorce (leaving the planet) or continue to misuse (growing anger of our counterpart as a result) we will have to learn how to live with her in a caring relationship.

In the world of becoming our beloved, we will have to find out how to be in harmony with her. This is the new religion. The processes between man and world are to be permeated with love.

Etymologically religion means „to bind fast“. More than ever before, we humans will need a lot of endurance to be married with this world. Sufis in all ages have been training themselves in this type of relationship. They called it the dynamics of Love, Lover and Beloved. Hazrat Inayat Khan mostly used the similar term of „Love, Harmony and Beauty“. Harmony is meant to be a state wherein lover and beloved are in tune. For sure being in tune with nature will, in the chaotic transition we are living through on our planet, will mostly not look like a peaceful affair. We will have to suspend our concepts of harmony.

Religion in the new era will be coined by a lot of freedom, because love cannot flourish if bounded by external commandments. Which form love will take, we don't know, because we don't know our beloved world. We just took her for granted till now.

At the same time, religion in the Anthropocene will need more loyalty than ever before, because the behaviour of the beloved will be full of unexpected moods. Floods, earthquakes, and droughts are quite scary! As are pandemics.

The reward, according to the words of Hazrat Inayat Khan, will be „worldly as well as heavenly“. We don't have to wait. Oneness is within reach.

**Conclusion:** The 4<sup>th</sup> response of our Movement to climate change is a life in partnership with all nature kingdoms

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one law, the law of reciprocity, which can be observed by a selfless conscience, together with a sense of awakened justice.”*

Religions through the ages taught man how to act in harmony with his fellow men. All kind of rules were given, all circling around one general spiritual truth quoted by Hazrat Inayat Khan from the Bible: “do unto others as thou wouldst they should do unto thee.”

In contradiction to this age-old truth, the motor behind the global economic development is the pursuit of self-interest. Nothing has seemed able to stop this power. Yes, it was mitigated in the western world by unions defending the rights of the workers. Yes, considerations about the environment also had some influence. But self-interest stands in the centre of the pursuit of profitability. Propelled by this motor, mankind will, according to the predominant world-wide capitalist ideology, ultimately find happiness.



But, Hazrat Inayat Khan told us that in pursuit of self-interest, man loses touch with his own real interest. Because, so he continues: “It is the law of reciprocity which saves man from being exposed to the higher powers, as a considerate man has less chance of being brought before the court.”

And now it is too late: the “higher powers” have awoken. Geologists would call these the deeper powers of the Earth. Suddenly we discover that the earth systems have become deregulated and that we are exposed to her reactions. The Earth “hits back”. It seems that another old rule: “An eye for eye, a tooth for tooth” is still valid. Mankind will have to face the fact that the living conditions for all beings on our planet have deteriorated beyond repair. We will have to acknowledge that the danger of extinction of the human race is no longer unthinkable.

Existence finally gave us the proof of the law of reciprocity. Until now it was a matter of belief, today it is a matter of fact: We don't act in our real interest if we carelessly use our freedom and technical possibilities. In the end it is in our interest to develop a sense of true justice. And for this we will have to drop a lot of prejudices about our so called rights. It is a matter of unlearning, more than learning. Each human being, so says the Sufi Master, is borne with a sense of justice within. It is just a matter of removing the covers to reach this natural ability to judge.

**Conclusion:** The 5<sup>th</sup> response of the Inayatiyya to climate change is to discover and show the workings of the law of reciprocity and to help ourselves and others to discover our inborn sense of justice.

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one family, the human family, which unites the children of earth indiscriminately in the parenthood of God.”*

What did Hazrat Inayat Khan mean when he talked about „children of earth“? Different explanations apply:

- taking the expression literally, it means that we are all made of earth or according to another Sufi saying, made of clay. The etymology of the name Adam is „man of clay“. The word human is related to the word humus (from the Latin word *humus* meaning earth or ground).
- Secondly, Murshid may have pointed to the fact that we humans are all children of the same Planet Earth.

- And possibly with „earth“ is meant Mother Earth as the counterpart of Father Heaven. Earth representing diversity, Heaven representing unity; both encompassed by “the One”.

Biodiversity loss and climate change cause the perception that the soil under our feet is crumbling. In this there is no division between north, south, east or west. It is a global perception.

The panic and distress connected with the environmental crisis [including climate change] varies. Those who pretend not to be affected by the climatic catastrophes try to defend their piece of earth against those who had to experience that their soil is no longer there or no longer able to sustain them.

The first group falls back into defending their national state. „We don't belong to the same world as you. Your world may be threatened or lost, ours is not.“!

The second group has nothing to lose and bangs on the doors of the rich, often risking their lives.

How to develop a common life for mankind under such circumstances? The only way out is to find out together which territory is habitable and with whom we want to share it. Millions of strangers will have to be guided in their search of a safe piece of Earth. We will have to build a collective life for mankind. So nothing is more innovative and less nostalgic than finding agreements about how and where migrants could land on some ground.

This search transcends any bonds of family, nation, religion. Every child of earth will have to ask him/herself, with whom to share this Earth.

Hazrat Inayat Khan states that man can only evolve by uniting himself with another.

In the Anthropocene this unity is no longer a goal for the few but we are on the way of finding out that all living beings together are necessary for the survival of the whole. All is interconnected and only if we recognise this fact, will we be able to live on Earth.

**Conclusion:** The 6th response of the Inayati Order to climate change is to know and to show how rewarding it is to share our piece of earth with others.

### 7<sup>th</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one moral, the love which springs forth from self-denial and blooms in deeds of beneficence.”*

More than ever before, man is the dominant living being, influencing all other living beings. Over the last century or two, he has developed such a tremendous power that he has even changed the geological processes on Earth.

We don't realise how far reaching our influence on nature has become. An example: of the total mass of all vertebrate animals, 30% are humans, 67% are domesticated animals and just 3% are wild animals.

Hazrat Inayat Khan: *In the Quran it is said, "We have made man the Caliph of the whole creation", in other words, the master of creation.*

In the actual philosophical discussions about the monstrous results of man-kind's 'mastery' some take the position that man has lost his right to play any special role at all on earth. Any form of anthropocentrism has to be avoided.

Others proclaim that these disastrous effects are just an interim phenomenon and that man will in the end reach a promised utopia when he just continues on his path. An unbroken anthropocentrism based on neglecting reality.

The Sufi attitude is anthropocentric and theocentric at the same time. Hazrat Inayat Khan: *“The perfection of God's manifestation is man. When man reaches perfection His manifestation is perfect and without man's perfection God's manifestation would not be perfect. Perfection is reached when man becomes altogether human.”*

So, in the eyes of the Sufi, God is dependent on „man becoming human“ in order that creation reaches its goal.

Morality until recently had mainly to do with our duties toward our fellow men. Moral commandments were given by the great teachers of humanity. But since the Renaissance, we no longer obey commandments. Philosophers like Kant elaborated on moral freedom. Sufism stands in the line of all religions and at the same time in the line of philosophical enlightenment.

Today with the dawn of the anthropocene age, morality receives a new connotation. If mankind wants to live on this earth, a moral necessity is the result. Our first obligation is to take care of the earth, before anything else.

Only mankind has this unique moral obligation. No other creature has any such responsibility. We are no longer free to do whatever we want. We are on our way to finding out that we have to curb our behaviour. It is up to us to prove (to God) that it is right that man dominates the world.

How to do that? By developing our capacity for love. Renunciation as an act of refraining from taking more than one is giving comes out of love alone.

*„O, it is excellent to have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.“* Isabella in Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure"

**Conclusion:** The 7th response of our Inayati Order is to help ourselves and others to experience the joy that is hidden behind renunciation. Nothing is lost, all is gained.

### 8<sup>th</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one object of praise, the beauty which uplifts the heart of its worshippers through all aspects from the seen to the unseen.”*

The main source of beauty used to be wild untouched nature. An overwhelming sadness overcomes us realizing that most of it has been destroyed.

The next most important source of beauty used to be the age-old countryside created by man cooperating with nature. Again a deep sadness overwhelms us, when we realize that more and more of these landscapes have disappeared and may never come back.

The third source of beauty used to be the rich diversity of human creativity in the innumerable different cultures around the world. With sadness we see how globalised consumer culture has just one direction: uniformity worldwide

When we observe the upcoming populist political leaders around the world it is the growing coarseness of their expression that strikes our ears. Maybe what one considers to be ugly, for others is pleasing. Hazrat Inayat Khan says: „that which is beautiful to one is not beautiful to another.“ But what destroys our planet cannot be beautiful.

There is just one way left over to treat our beloved earth and all her inhabitants: by respecting her proportions and integrity. Sufis search for the face of the beloved in all they see and create. So in our ways of production we will have to be consonant with the earth if we want to maintain our love affair with her and bring peace to her and ourselves.

That's why Hazrat Inayat Khan considers gardening and farming as art forms. He even says: *"Gardening is music, farming is music"*. The times where beauty had its place in the museum and pesticides "maintained" our crops is over. Apart from the fact that it is ugly, maintaining our livelihood by killing innumerable other creatures is no longer possible because we are discovering that these other beings are part of the life of the whole that sustains us.

After destroying most of the natural paradises, man will start to create new ones and so will start pleasing not just himself, but also the earth.

**Conclusion:** The 8<sup>th</sup> response of the Inayatiyya to climate change is to create new paradises, thus pleasing not just ourselves, but also the earth.

### 9<sup>th</sup> Sufi Thought:

*"There is one truth, the true knowledge of our being, within and without, which is the essence of all wisdom."*

The truth about the Anthropocene is that man worldwide influences his environment in ways more powerful than some of the great powers of nature.

This thesis from the Dutch Nobel prize winner Paul Crutzen and his team stands today as largely acknowledged in the international scientific world (1 and appendix) .

Some conclude from this thesis that man reigns over nature or at least will do so in the near future. Climate change is in the eyes of these just a crisis that will pass because man will in the end create a happy world for people. As a matter of fact, such an ideology denies the fact that global economic development is creating delusional worlds that are incompatible with the possibilities of our earth.

The consequences of the discovery of the Anthropocene are much more far reaching. The fact that man has developed a power that influences the basic rhythms and structures of the planet does not mean that he can reign over the world. It simply means that the state of the planet depends on the state of the human being. The division between inner and outer world has been overcome.

If we want to understand what happens to our earth, we will have to study ourselves. If we want to understand the state we are in as humans, we can study our planet.

This insight should put an end to the megalomania of ideologies such as ecomodernism. But it does not. Because knowledge in itself is not enough to generate change. We will have to give up habits. We will even have to give up any concept of who we are as individuals and as humanity. These processes of shattering concepts and habits on the rock of truth is the age-old science of Sufism.

Scientific truth is not enough for a turnaround on our planet. It needs truth in practice, not just in theory.

**Conclusion :** The 9<sup>th</sup> response of our Movement is to prove our truths by applying them.

#### 10<sup>th</sup> Sufi Thought:

*“There is one path, the annihilation in the Unlimited, which raises the mortal to immortality, and in which resides all perfection.”*

The pursuit of individual well-being has brought us to the verge of the destruction of our planet.

Sufism invites us to drop the concept of our individual self as it stands in the way of real happiness.

After the break of the Anthropocene, man is challenged to give up the idea of subject (our individual self) and object (the world around us). The truth is that sometimes the subject is world and the object is self. Just if we dare to get lost into the rhythms, meanings and needs of our earth with all her inhabitants will we have the change to discover a self which is able to embrace all these others.

*„I lost myself and I found you at last“.* (Hazrat Inayat Khan)

**Conclusion:** The tenth response of our Inayatiyya to climate change is to practice zikr and to teach zikr.

#### Sources:

The 10 Sufi thoughts can be found on [www.inayatiyya.org](http://www.inayatiyya.org).

In the preparation of this essay two publications played a major role:

From the French philosopher Bruno Latour: Down to Earth, Politics in the New Climatic Regime, Polity Press 2018.

From the Australian philosopher Clive Hamilton: Defiant Earth, Polity Press 2017.

Note (1):

Will Steffen, Jacques Grinvald, Paul Crutzen & John McNeil, the Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives, Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A 369 (2011)

Appendix:

Royal Society, Philosophical Transactions A Published: November 11, 2010, UK: Theme Issue 'The Anthropocene: a new epoch of geological time?' compiled and edited by Mark Williams, Jan Zalasiewicz, Alan Haywood and Mike Ellis: *“The human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system. Although global-scale human influence on the environment has been recognized since the 1800s, the term Anthropocene, introduced about a decade ago, has only recently become widely, but informally, used in the global change research community. However, the term has yet to be accepted formally as a new geological epoch or era in Earth history. In this paper, we put forward the case for formally recognizing the Anthropocene as a new epoch in Earth history, arguing that the advent of the Industrial Revolution around 1800 provides a logical start date for the new epoch. We then explore recent trends in the evolution of the Anthropocene as humanity proceeds into the twenty-first century, focusing on the profound changes to our relationship with the rest of the living world and on early attempts and proposals for managing our relationship with the large geophysical cycles that drive the Earth’s climate system.”*



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