



Character-Building  
*of*  
Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan

with Commentary  
*by*  
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Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,  
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls  
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

## Chapter 1

GATHEKA: The will-power plays a great part in character-building. And the will-power becomes feeble when a person yields to every little tendency, inclination, and fancy he has; but when a person fights against every little fancy and tendency and inclination he learns to fight with himself, and in this way he develops will-power.

TASAWWUF: What is will-power? Will-power is the power of the heart. And what is character-building? Character-building is using the heart-power to advance the cause of the God-Ideal in the realm of human personality. Sufis call this practice *Mujahida*—utmost exertion to overcome one's small self. But one does not overcome one's small self by any efforts centered in the small self. To give in to unworthy habits is weakness; to overcome all unworthiness is the work of the Sufi, whose only strength is in practicing the presence of God. The presence of God in the human heart is the greatest power there is. It is the one virtue that is more powerful than a thousand vices, as Hazrat Inayat Khan has said. No amount of negativism can stand up to this power of heart when fully realized.

GATHEKA: When once a person's inclinations, fancies, and tendencies have grown stronger than his will-power, he experiences in his life several enemies existing in his own self, and he finds it difficult to combat them. For inclinations, fancies, and tendencies, when powerful, do not let will-power work against them.

TASAWWUF: There are many tendencies in the human being. We have physical tendencies, mental inclinations, emotional fancies, all of which in one way or another constitute the elements of our personality. The whole range of needs, wants, likes and dislikes are often in a state of imbalance in the generality. But a Sufi learns to apply the rules of rhythm, of harmony, and through proper posture, breathing and attitude we can experience body, heart and soul being healed and re-vivified every moment of life whether we are in spiritual practice, or engaged in daily affairs, or both which is the ideal.

The Sufi attempts to create clear channels through which the will-power can flow without obstruction. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the enemies within ones self act solely to prevent creation of these clear channels.

GATHEKA: If there is any such thing as self-denial, it is this practice; and by this practice in time one attains to a power which may be called mastery over oneself.

TASAWWUF: There have been many austere means, some applied excessively, used over the centuries by people who had convinced themselves that through such means they would obtain spiritual liberation. We have the example of Lord Buddha to the contrary. He underwent severe austerities with no positive result other than that he knew that was not the way. It was through the concentrated practice of compassionate meditation that Lord Buddha realized the Supreme Identity.

The real austerity is to deny anything that would prevent our performing the compassionate meditation, and not only habits but even beliefs might be included here. It is not external conditions so much as fixed outlooks that must be removed.

GATHEKA: In small things of everyday life one neglects this consideration because one thinks, "These are **my** tendencies, **my** fancies, **my** inclinations, and by respecting them I respect myself, by considering them I consider myself." But one forgets that what one calls my is not oneself, it is what wills that is oneself.

TASAWWUF: A modern Hindu teacher has said that if we make a list of everything we call **my** (house, money, clothes, possessions, wife, husband, children), every **my** takes us one step farther away from the Divine Presence. More subtle and difficult to remove are attachments to habits and whims, for the very reason that they seem to be "within" —yet they are external to the soul.

GATHEKA: Therefore in the Christian prayer it is said, Thy Will be done, which means, Thy Will when it works through me; in other words, my will which is Thy Will, be done.

TASAWWUF: To this end Sufis practice Zikr and Fikr, each of which begins with the effective denial of the limited self, and culminates in the affirmation of the perfect Self, or God. References to becoming like an empty flute in Sufi poetry may often inspire man to become hollow of self so that the Divine Will may play through one's instrumentality.

GATHEKA: It is this illusion of confusing one's possession with oneself that creates all illusion and keeps man from self-realization.

TASAWWUF: In Zen Buddhism monks are trained to recognize the emptiness of possessions. In Zen poetry one may appreciate seeing the moon reflected upon the surface of a lake, but neither does the lake possess the moon nor does the monk possess the fleeting scenes of nature. The monk, like the lake, is a mirror. The real self abides in the depth, and not on the surface.

GATHEKA: Life is a continual battle.

TASAWWUF: The esoteric practices are like a water reservoir in the life of a Sufi. The inner life from which he draws his strength to face life in the outer world is like a reservoir. If one does not draw from this reservoir, or if one fails to replenish these waters from time to time, he may weaken from within and thereby cause losses on many fronts in the battle of life.

GATHEKA: Man struggles with things that are outside him, and so he gives a chance to the foes who exist in his own being. Therefore the first thing necessary in life is to make peace for the time being with the outside world, in order to prepare for the war which is to be fought within oneself. Once peace is made within, one will gain by that sufficient strength and power to be used through the struggle of life within and without.

TASAWWUF: This was the example of the Prophet Mohammed. He retired to the cave before he embarked on campaigns against external enemies of the Message of God. Stringent avoidance of pillage and rapine was enforced upon the soldiery by the Prophet and his Khalifs. And after the campaigns for Islam were accomplished in the external world Mohammed said, "We have accomplished the lesser jihad (holy war); now we must fight the greater jihad (the battle within)."

GATHEKA: Self pity is the worst poverty. When a person says, "I am ..." with pity, before he has said anything more he has diminished himself to half of what he is; and what is said further, diminishes him totally; nothing more of him is left afterwards.

TASAWWUF: Here again we have the identification of one's being with limitation. There is no greater sin than to persist through life in such delusion. Therefore Sufis have stressed the importance of positive concentrations which lead to oneness and unity.

GATHEKA: There is so much in the world that we can pity and which it would be right for us to take pity upon, but if we have no time free from our own self we cannot give our mind to others in the world.

TASAWWUF: This does not mean some kind of dualistic approach. Pity here should be taken to mean that we see others as parts of ourself; we should see the perfectibility of what may appear to be a severe limitation. In this way the wise are able to bring others toward completion and perfection. But let us begin by seeing the perfectibility of those to whom one bears a natural responsibility, and not presume that one has the capacity of a prophet.

GATHEKA: Life is one long journey, and the further behind we have left our self the further we have progressed toward the goal. Verily when the false self is lost the true self is discovered.

TASAWWUF: The journey is one from manhood to Godhood. Nor do we leave behind our small self by negating manhood. We leave behind our small self by treading the path of the Ideal which is to experience the spiritual reality in all things, affairs and beings.

## Chapter 2

GATHEKA: In character-building it is most necessary that one should learn how to face the world, the world where one meets with sorrows and troubles and pleasures and pains. It is very difficult for one to hide them from the world, and at the same time a wise person is not meant to show all he feels nor to show at every moment what he feels. The ordinary person, like a machine, reacts in answer to every outer influence and inner impulse; and in this way he very often cannot keep to the law of the music of life.

TASAWWUF: A Sufi on the path of character-building will not generally take a critical attitude toward the world; if he is critical at all it is of his own shortcomings. He will look at the world and its problems as a challenge and as an opportunity—and will order the raw materials of disharmony into such rhythms and harmonies as he is able through the strength and conviction of his realization.

When one reacts to every passing influence or impulse, one's reservoir becomes rapidly drained. The further one goes in this manner, the less he is able to bring any depth of feeling into the music of life, until one's life has become so surface-ized that only noise is apparent, the music has been lost.

GATHEKA: Life to a wise person is music; and in that symphony he has to play a certain part. If one were feeling so low that one's heart was sounding a lower pitch, and the demand of life at that moment was that one should voice a higher pitch, then one would feel that one had failed in that music in which one was meant to play one's part fittingly. This is the test by which you can distinguish the old soul and the child soul. The child soul will give way to every feeling; the old soul will strike the higher note in spite of every difficulty.

TASAWWUF: This is the whole and sum of the teachings on character-building. One is always honor-bound to see and to seek music where it may seem to be absent, even to create rhythm and harmony where such realities might seem most impossible. It is true that the old soul may take himself to task for playing a sour note in life's music; and yet the old soul will also have the wisdom to laugh at a sour note for what it is. A child soul will neither take itself to task or be able to laugh from deep down.

GATHEKA: There are moments when laughter must be kept back, and there are times when tears must be withheld. And those who have arrived at the stage where they can act efficiently the part that they are meant to act in this life's drama, have even power over the expression of their face; they can even turn their tears into smiles, or their smiles into tears.

TASAWWUF: While the ability to control laughter and tears is associated with stage acting, a Sufi practices this mastery as a form of the alchemy of personality. The emotions of human beings are like the different colors of an artist's palette, or the different notes of an accomplished singer. The one who is able, through scientific and artful arrangement of these factors, may create a picture of life itself, and the impact of seeing the whole of life summed up in a single being is potent to transform the onlookers. In this way, the Sufi is able through his own example to give a picture of God in Whose Image we have been created.

GATHEKA: One may ask, is it not hypocrisy not to be natural? But he who has control over his nature is more natural; he is not only natural, he is the master of nature, while the one who lacks power over nature, in spite of his naturalness, is weak.

TASAWWUF: The Hindu teachings posit Purusha and Prakriti; Purusha may be regarded as the supreme indwelling Spirit, and Prakriti may be regarded as the movement and stuff of Nature. The spiritual seeker who is able through adeptship or Divine Grace to fully realize his identity with Purusha is the master of Nature; the devotee who moves in the sphere of Prakriti and identifies himself with any of the three **gunas**, or modes of natural activity, lacks power even over his own nature.

GATHEKA: Also, it must be understood that real civilization means the art of life. What is that art? It is knowing the music of life. Once a soul has awakened to the continual music of life, that soul will consider it as his responsibility, as his duty, to play his part in outer life, even if it be contrary to his inner condition for the moment.

TASAWWUF: There have been civilizations based upon the divine principle. We may study the past civilizations of ancient Egypt, of ancient India, and of other nations so founded, and see from their arts and literature a very high order of spiritual culture. One of the chief reasons for this high culture is that the wisdom schools flourished to such an extent in those periods of history that even leaders of state became impressed with the music of life and its continuation; they felt responsible to represent this inner realization to the world at large. And it was this sense of keen responsibility to life's music that created what might be called the real kingship.

GATHEKA: One must know at every moment in one's daily life: What does life demand of me, what does it ask of me, and how shall I answer the demand of my life? This requires one to be awakened fully to life's conditions.

TASAWWUF: By asking oneself these questions, one avoids the risk of losing touch with human beings and the world around one. Such inquiries demand that one face life, and strive to integrate one's highest motives into the overall procession of events that we term life.

To be awakened fully to life's conditions, Sufis employ *ryazat*, or spiritual practices. There are many types of such practices, mostly based upon sound, silence or breath, that may instill a sense of coordination with one's guidance. In fact, this guidance has no other purpose than to awake its followers fully to life's inner and outer conditions.

GATHEKA: One must have insight into human nature, and one must be able to know one's own condition fully.

TASAWWUF: If one, through assiduous spiritual practice, should come to know one's own condition and to become fully acquainted with it, one will spontaneously have insight into human nature generally.

GATHEKA: If one says, "I am as I am; if I am sad, I am sad; if I am glad, I am glad," that will not do. Even the earth will not bear the person who will not answer life's demand. The sky will not tolerate that person, and the sphere will not accommodate him who is not ready to give what life demands of him.

TASAWWUF: The one who gives way to every little whim of self-pity, who identifies with every passing feeling, is like a cork tossed hither and thither upon the waves of an ever-changing sea; such a one has no anchor. The earth will not support one who refuses to stand on his feet; the sky will prove impossible to one who will not rise above problems; and the sphere will imprison one who will not accommodate the events and human beings in one's milieu.

GATHEKA: If this is true, then it is best when it is easily done and willingly done.

TASAWWUF: So many of our problems arise from unwillingness to face life. If we could only realize that every refusal to face life weakens us, and that every willingness to face life gives strength, we shall have learned a most valuable lesson in character-building.

GATHEKA: In the orchestra there is a conductor and there are many who play the music; and every player of an instrument has to fulfill his part in the performance. If he does not do it rightly, it is his fault. The conductor will not listen if he says he did not do it properly because he was sad or because he was too glad. The conductor of the orchestra is not concerned with his sadness or his gladness. He is concerned with the part that the particular musician must play in the whole symphony.

TASAWWUF: In many religious traditions we find mention of celestial musicians, called angels, devas, gandharvas or upsaras. Their music is one of praise and spontaneity, and their conductor is the vibration of the Divine Presence which harmonizes and co-ordinates their every note. When man learns to so praise the Divine Presence in Whom we live and move and have our being, he too will play his music with complete willingness and without any reticence at all. Nevertheless, any music is marred by over-enthusiasm on the one hand which leads to its own type of mistakes, and lack of enthusiasm on the other hand which deprives music of its very existence.

GATHEKA: This is the nature of our lives. The further we advance in our part in this orchestra, the more efficiently we perform our part in life's symphony.

TASAWWUF: As the nature of life is progression, we may see parallels in the four movements of a symphony; we may even call the movements of our life by the name "seasons." To advance in life's symphony does not mean simply to move through the seasons of life, and to age accordingly. Rather to a Sufi this advancement indicates a growing mastery so that one may become responsible for whole sections of an orchestra, and even to manifest conductor-ship if called for. Not only this, but also the ability to create whole new symphonies and variations, even to create the impression of different seasons whenever the necessity of their associations and feelings may be required, is evidence of such mastery.

GATHEKA: In order to be able to have this control over oneself, what is necessary? We must have control over our inner self, because every outward manifestation is nothing but a reaction of the inner condition. Therefore the first control that one has to gain is over one's own self, one's inner self, which is done by strengthening the will, and also by understanding life better.

TASAWWUF: And how is the will strengthened? The will is strengthened by breaking oneself of every little habit that keeps one attached to superficiality, and by a willingness to dive deep into the ocean of one's heart and soul and bringing up the pearls of God's presence and guidance. If we only knew that the human will and the Divine Will become united through the practice of listening to the voice which constantly comes from within, we should all understand life much better.

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