

Spiritual Training Through Music
An Original Sangatha
by
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(Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

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.
Sangatha Series I: Number 1
Spiritual Training Through Music

Spiritual training through music has no other aim than spiritual training generally, only its method is different and sometimes its application is different. Before Solomon erected the temple for Allah, David sang his divine songs. It was this holy music which prepared the way, sanctifying the ground in the city of Zion. So Sufis chant Zikr for the purification of houses of devotion which are the temples of Allah in another sense.

Where is Allah? Allah is pictured as seated upon the Arsh-Throne, the center of the Universe, and ruling all creation therefrom. Where do you find the Arsh-Throne? It is not far, being located in the center of your being because Allah has made you in Allah's Image and Likeness. The center of your being corresponds with the center of Allah's Being, and the outside of your being is like Allah's physical creation.

One Scripture says, "In the beginning the Word was God," and another Scripture calls Brahma "sound." Now where will you find the sound if the sound is God? If God is seated on a throne and the altar is in your heart, if the nature of Allah is sound, where will you find this Source of sound if not in your heart? Therefore Sufis first develop feeling; without deep feeling it is impossible to express ourselves spiritually through music.

Before we take even the first lesson in music, Zikr practice is necessary to purify the body and Fikr also may be required to purify the mind. When we feel or hear the divine sound Hu within or without our being, we are ready for the musical expression, but first it is necessary to feel Hu or to hear that sound. Some hear it, but feeling is more important for through love of sound we come to God, through identity with sound, we become identical with God.

Why is this? Because the spiritual training in music is not to give you a great voice, not to make you become an artist, nor singer, nor musician, although it may do any one or all of these things. The real purpose is that Allah expresses fully through the human body, through your physical vehicle. Therefore, whether you take up singing or play an instrument or devote yourself to dancing, the first step is the same, to feel the divine Hu within yourself. Then your body is consecrated to be the temple of God and you are ready to learn self-expression through sound and music.

So concentrate on this sound within and without, in your ears and in your heart and especially in the practice of Zikr.

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Sangatha Series I: Number 2
Self-Expression

It is the sound Hu which is the keynote of all sounds. All sounds come from it and return to it. This is not a question of metaphysics, whether God is higher in the aspect of silence or of sound, but with the physics of sound one is concerned. At the same time consider God as the actor, Allah as the doer. For musical training

according to the Sufi method is impossible if we are self-conscious. Therefore the first exercise is to enable us to lose the self in the greater Being of Allah.

We are trained to place the sound Hu in the heart. How this is done is not so important; that it is done is all important. If we do not learn another lesson, if we cannot develop beyond this point, if we cannot get power or beauty or expression or quality, it does not matter so much if the voice comes from the heart.

The sound Hu is given in Zikr. It may be sung in Zikr or it may be sung as a separate exercise a prescribed number of times. Zikr helps to place the voice in the heart. Placing the voice in the heart aids greatly in the true performance of Zikr, which is not only to pronounce the words, but to feel their inner meaning and to feel the resonance within our body.

Resonance comes through the repetition of Hu either spoken or blown or sung. All are satisfactory but once the voice is placed in the heart, once the center of speech and feeling is located there, singing is most valuable for it enables God to speak through us. This is done through long practice in Zikr and by concentrating on the sound Hu coming from the heart. Starting with a few repetitions, we can try it three times until we have mastered the three repetitions, then try five, then ten and even up to twenty times. In this, haste is of no value; progress should correspond with our ability to keep consciousness in the heart and to concentrate on the Arsh-Throne of God in a daily concentration.

The great value of music and Zikr from the moral point of view is that thereby the etheric current becomes anchored, so to speak, in the heart. This raises the voice upward; so it is often used as a training of young mureeds (in age) for personal self-control, to bring balance, purification and spiritualization of the sex nature. Besides there is a natural desire to sing, play or dance. Sufis do not repress these natural desires, but direct them toward God. In the end the true Self will find expression and bring great joy and happiness. This expression will grow from control over the simplest sound into what Allah has in store for you, be it the perfection of one note with the sound Hu springing from the heart, or be it all the knowledge of the Universe in music, metaphysics and life.

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Sangatha Series I: Number 3
Spiritual Training Through Music**

After placing the voice in the heart, the next important thing to observe is the breath, but mostly it is necessary to place the voice in the heart. Many who are anxious to develop by means of breath will not watch the heart closely. For them it is better to choose some other means of breath control.

There is control of the breath by physical means, by mental means and by the heart. This shows that the breath is the connecting link between all vehicles. In some spiritual exercises there are mechanical movements. In the purification breaths, rhythm is controlled or regulated more or less mechanically, but in Kasab not only is control applied to maintain rhythm but also to gain strength. In Fikr the rhythm is controlled mentally; at the same time, because of divine concentration, Fikr also leads to sound control by the heart, as well as by the mind.

Now from the Sufi point of view, God is expressed in Music, not us. While God is seated in the heart, God also breathes the breath of life through the nostrils. Breath is necessary for life and therefore required in self-expression. Even Allah breathes in order to express the Self. Allah began the creation by inhalation and exhalation. As this was God's way of producing a sound, so it is the spiritual way of making sound. We cannot make a sound except by exhalation, so there must be a close connection between breath and sound.

Now breath has many uses in connection with sound, such as regulation of rhythm, power and tone production. Breath, however, is the means, not the source. Physical control only produces physical power; thought control supplies mental power and by it we can hold a note much longer and easier, besides its

having a finer quality. So we can hold a note even longer by heart control and it is still easier once it is learned; then the quality can become so fine it can even be called angelic.

For it is the animal which produces music through pure physical breath, the jinn music is connected with the mental breath, while the angelic music comes from the heart. Our voice can be like the animal's, like the jinn's and even like the angel's. For musical progress no other breath exercises are needed besides what is prescribed for other spiritual unfoldment except that there is a need for greater application. At the same time greatest care is required, for the prime attention is always to the heart, not to the breath.

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Sangatha Series I: Number 4
Kasab**

Kasab is one of the most important practices for those who are to express themselves through the science and art of music. Kasab is not generally given in the early stages of mureedship, and especially for those who are to learn more about music it is better to teach Zikr and Fikr and have them do those practices for some time. The preparations for Kasab also assist us to understand the creation of sound through the heart.

The first purpose of Kasab is rhythm, which is not a fixed rhythm but a control over rhythm. The best rhythm is the most natural rhythm and this comes through control by feeling. No doubt will-power is also important, but will is strongest when attuned to feeling. It is not always wise to sing or play anything any time we have a wish. There is music of the body, of the mind, and of the heart; desire also will not enable us to produce heart music. When the heart is not in it, it is not heart music, it is not spiritual music.

The other aspect of Kasab is depth. Depth also has two aspects. Breath may be long and penetrate to the deepest parts of the body and breath may be strong and bring power and energy. The penetrative breath effects the range of voice and the powerful breath effects control of voice. The penetrative breath not only enables us to increase the physical range of the voice, lowering and highering the pitch, but also furthers insight on other planes. However, control is more important than range, and rhythm is still more important. It keeps us balanced, and in balance is the very secret of life and success.

During practice of Kasab the voice may naturally change in quality and range. This prepares us for musical instructions. No doubt heart tones can be produced without Kasab and no doubt we may attain to great inspiration without Kasab, but while striving is always "Toward the One" the method includes union with all souls, and all forms which constitute the Spirit of Guidance, the Divine Harmony. So the real unity brings expression and realization of harmony, until it reaches its perfection in God.

This harmony always concords with the keynote in our heart. There is no better way than the use of music to determine whether we are at peace and in harmony with the world, for all things can be measured by the voice in the heart. The whole spiritual secret of raga is that the pitch comes from within. When body, mind, and heart are all attuned to the soul, which is God, one is a real Kawwali, a hall of Divine Sound, wherein Allah can produce the supernal music through us, as a human instrument and mediator.

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Sangatha Series I: Number 5
Spiritualizing the Voice**

As voice is used by all mureeds, whether in devotion or in prayer or preaching, or even in ordinary speech, we are often given special breath practices. It may be said that all practices which end in blowing out the breath through the lips, or pronouncing the syllable Hu, spiritualize the voice. The fourth of the breaths of purification especially prepares along this line.

Next comes Zikr. The purpose of Zikr is to spiritualize the whole personality, and its ending especially purifies the voice. Sounds La, Al, Hu, which form the basis of Zikr, are the Natural Sounds. They represent the three aspects of existence; Al, Position; La, Negation; Hu, Universalization. The proof of this is in the body. The names of God formed by the sacred letters of the Hebrew alphabet and by various means in the Islamic religion, are the most spiritual words. Repetition of them in every form is beneficial.

What caused the downfall of the Hebrew Kingdom? They forgot their God, and they substituted the Attribute for the Essence. Such words as Adonai, Shaddai and other Hebrew names of God are really attributes and their form, pronunciation and repetition corresponds to the Sufi Wazifas. Zikr is higher than Wazifa insofar as it is concerned with the Essence of God, rather than with God's Attributes. Therefore, Allah and Je-Hu-Vah are the most sacred names of God.

Now the reversal of the process which destroyed the Kingdom of Israel, can again restore the Kingdom of God on earth. This is to pronounce in spiritual manner the most sacred names. However else they differ in their instructions, all practice Zikr in some form, and there are also souls not on the path to God who sometimes practice Zikr.

Besides Zikr and the breath of purification, there is another exercise for spiritualizing the voice. This is given especially to those who become speakers and preachers, and it consists of some special Fikr; blowing out the breath in the form Hu, as in the exhalation of the fourth purification breath. In it, God is felt in the breath, rather than in the heart. For while in Zikr words are spoken, yet God is to be felt in the Silence; in spiritualizing the breath, it is we who are kept silent while God speaks through our breath and so through our voice.

For this reason, often three years' training is necessary before Kasab and musical practices can be given to mureeds. Even then, it is not necessary to change these practices any more rapidly than other spiritual work. Not that there is any fixed time, but sometimes years are required to prepare the body to be a suitable vehicle for singing or dancing. The playing of instruments is a little different, but the more the divine breath can be utilized, the sweeter any form of music.

Music lessons are not always of benefit, for just as the mind has fixed habits, fixed grooves, so has the voice. In the inner training, concentration and meditation are necessary to free the mind from subserviency to thought forms and also enable it to think willingly and quickly. So we also learn to free the voice from all sound, entering into the silence, and also to be able to make any kind of sound quickly as the occasion requires.

"Blessed are they who know when to speak; more blessed are they who know when to keep silent; most blessed are those who have no tongue."

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Sangatha Series I: Number 6
Spiritual Training Through Music**

The perfection of the note comes from control of breath and control of mind. Although we may not notice it, the jagged edges of a note come from a wrong mode of mind, or from lack of clarity of thought due to incomplete concentration. Now in music the same word "mode" is used, and in spiritual music the object is to make the mode of the music and the mode of the inner being the same. Consequently not too much attention is paid to pitch at first, whether the note be high or low, flat or sharp, or even loud or soft. Before these things are learned, the sound must be properly produced in and from the heart.

Then it is necessary to remove the rough edges from the tone. The more selfless one becomes, the more automatic is this process. In other words, the heart note is the real note. It is in the angelic world that the

inhabitants spend their time in song, and the best songs are those in praise of God. Mureeds may sing their Wazifas if desirable; first these will be in monotones, to get the note in the heart and keep it there. Wazifa has no value unless it is in the heart and singing the Wazifa sometimes helps the voice as well as the soul in its unfoldment.

Now what is the purpose of Wazifa? It is to clear away thoughts and impressions which prevent us from realizing an inner purpose. Wazifa helps to purify the mind, and purification of mind helps to purify the voice. What is meant by purity is the right type of voice for each occasion in speaking or singing—not to use harsh tones when tender ones are proper; not to speak loudly when a gentle word will suffice; not to check the voice when full expression is needed.

There are Wazifas which bring out fullness in the voice, which deal with majesty or power of Allah, which may be called Jelali Wazifas, and there are Jemali Wazifas which develop the qualities of mercy and tenderness. So Wazifas may be sung to bring out qualities in the voice, but their chief application is to effect mental control. In the Takbir (repetition of Allahu Akbar) the Moslems have used a Jelali Wazifa vocally, both spoken and sung, to excellent purpose.

The other difficulty is with the breath, to keep it in rhythm, to keep it smooth. In the early stages it is not important if the breath is slow or fast or deep or shallow or whether it penetrates deeply into the body or only reaches the lungs. The Sufi culture is a heart culture primarily, not a breath training. The breath is the ladder, not the station. So all attention is to placing the voice in the heart. After that, control of breath through rhythm and balance purifies the note from the heart.

Now what is the next step? It is to sing another note in the heart and then refer back to the first note. This may be the opposite course to Zikr where we begin with the whole phrase and end with the syllable Hu. For while La and Al may be practiced separately, the best spiritual sound comes through Hu. In Wazifa and Fikr it may be given many times; as part of oral Zikr it may be given many times, but in the sung or intoned Zikr only a few repetitions are necessary.

The perfection of these few notes is more important than anything else. Besides, the sound Hu is easiest to pronounce in the heart.

The Hu sound may be sung at various pitches. Then the next practice is to repeat Allahu either with or without movement of the head. If the head movement interferes with the voice, then the movement is stopped until Allahu is sung perfectly; after that El Allahu may be intoned with or without movement, and finally all Zikr with movement.

This is one way, but not the only way, of developing the voice spiritually. It differs from oral Zikr in that only a few repetitions are necessary to produce proper qualities. In practice greatest care should be taken to see that each syllable of Allahu is intoned correctly before trying El Allahu, and that the latter is perfected before trying the whole Zikr.

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Sangatha Series I: Number 7
Training in Zikr**

In training in Zikr two methods are used: to give the whole of Zikr and perfect ourselves in the whole of Zikr, or to perfect each syllable or serbah of Zikr before trying the whole.

When the whole Zikr is to be chanted, this is done mostly in group. New mureeds benefit by listening a number of times before joining in the group. They do this by following the others or a selected leader, until they get the accurate swing. These mureeds are also given the vocative Zikr as an esoteric practice, which helps with musical Zikr.

The other method can be studied whether one listens to Zikr or not. In this it is important to get the keynote of the soul, to feel a certain note in the heart, to get the right attunement and expression in each note. La, Al and Hu are each tried separately a number of times. When Hu is done well, work on Zikr is begun, this being the fourth serbah of Zikr. Then when the other sounds are produced, the third and second serbahs of Zikr may be sung or chanted. Finally all Zikr can be repeated.

In this method, failure with one syllable or note requires repetition from the beginning. Thus in the first stage one has only to repeat Hu, perhaps three times correctly. Then, when one is training in Allahu, this phrase should be repeated three times with perfectly rounded heart tones. Before the talib is fitted for the next stage, they should be able to repeat Allahu at least three consecutive times without any rough edges to the voice. So with transition from El Allahu to the whole of Zikr; all syllables should bring pure tones from the heart. So the perfection of Zikr comes from the perfection of each syllable, each sound and each breath.

No doubt when the whole of Zikr is tried, it may require some practice to sing it all three times in succession correctly. All this becomes a preparation for the Zikr chant which consists of 48 lines, every syllable of which may become perfected in tone quality, and this is only one part of perfection in Zikr. Therefore those who are given the instruction in Zikr and in music will find it takes some time to progress to perfection along this line, yet it is very beautiful and sometimes brings the greatest joy to Zakir.

The reason is that the voice will be changing naturally and it is very bad to force it. It is not important to repeat Zikr in chant form a larger number of times than prescribed; it is important to get every syllable smooth and to perfect the vibrations. So we may delay singing Zikr and practice Hu for many months, perhaps giving only three repetitions a night, or many repetitions a night, but all the time purifying, deepening and strengthening the note, passing on to other notes, learning the qualities of sound, and all with the one syllable Hu. But that will be found to be the most important practice, the fundamental practice, the echoing of the voice of God in our heart, and the echoing of our voice in the heart of Allah.

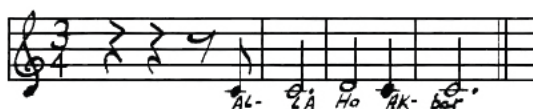
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Practices taken from “Spiritual Training Through Music”**

“Before we take even the first lesson in (Spiritual) etc., Music, Zikr Practice is necessary to purify the body and Fikr also may be required to purify the mind. When we feel or hear the Divine sound Hu within or without our being, we are ready for the musical expression Some hear it, but feeling is more important, for through love of sound we come to love of God; through identity with sound, we become identical with God.”

So concentrate on this sound within and without in your ears, in your heart—especially in the practice of Zikr.”

Concentrate on Hu coming from the heart, either spoken, blown, or sung. Start with a few repetitions until we have mastered that; then five, then ten, and even up to twenty times. In this, haste is of no value. Progress should correspond with one’s ability to keep the consciousness in the heart and to concentrate on the Arsh-throne of God in a daily concentration.

1. Sing Wazifas or Hu in monotone—placing sound in heart.
2. Sing another note, refer back to first note using Hu or Wazifa.



Zikr Practice: First sing Hu. When this is perfected, then progress to Allahu; then El Allahu; then full Zikr. Each step of this practice should be done three times fully from the heart before progressing to the next step.

For musical progress no other breath exercises are needed besides what is prescribed for other spiritual unfoldment except that there is need for greater application. At the same time greatest care is required, for the prime attention is always to the heart, not to the breath.

This paper was classified as a Sangatha by Murshid SAM. The papers on this level from Hazrat Inayat Khan were withheld from him by the Sufi Movement et. al., so he wrote his own. “An Original Sangatha” has been added to the title—Murshid Wali Ali Meyer, Ed.

Edited further by Murshid Tansen O’Donohoe, February 2023