

Memories of Murshid Samuel Lewis

*by Yasmin Spiegel, from a letter regarding Amen Dance,
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When Murshid S.A.M. began teaching us all to dance, it grew out of his work with astrological Walks, the Walks of the prophets and walking while concentrating on an individual sacred phrase or attribute of Allah. Everyone has seen "Sunseed," wherein Murshid's voice comes clearly over the film, "Right foot, left foot, Allah, Allah." He began with the basics, stressing that attunement (Tasawwuri) was the key to all esoteric studies. We learned to attune to our teacher, who, in turn was attuning to his teacher, who was attuning to his teacher, and on and on, up the chain of the silsila. Dancing was not only a way to experience natural rhythms and group attunement, but also to promote Murshid's favorite agenda: love, joy and peace!

We started with the Arabic phrases, partly because the words are so accessibly magnetic. (How many people in the world have reached God realization by chanting, "God, God, God," as opposed to "Allah, Allah, Allah?") I believe that he also started with Arabic in memory of Hazrat Inayat Khan, whom Murshid constantly reminded us was his first teacher, and therefore a very special heart connection. The Dervish Dances served the purpose of imparting the rhythms of the macrocosm/microcosm, as well. He didn't need to voice these ideas. You could feel the planets spinning around the solar system, while at the same time the electrons and neutrons plummeted around the molecular structure inside your body cells.

Murshid always told us that he had vast numbers of Dances coming to him while he slept, shopped, ate, etc. He indicated that he understood that certain sacred phrases and traditions were getting the present focus of attention, but that he would be starting to work with Christian phrases and initiating Christian Dances soon. He spent a lot of time emphasizing the theme that Jerusalem was the heart chakra of the world, and that when Jews, Muslims and Christians learned to eat, dance and pray together, there would at last be peace in that most troubled part of the world. He sparked tremendous efforts and dedication among his students to develop these ideas. Much work was done, particularly in the Jewish tradition ("Hallelujah, The Three Rings") and the Islamic tradition.

As he neared the end of life, although we, his students, did not know this, he was moving faster and faster, traveling back and forth across the country, spinning like a whirling dervish barely touching down in each city, giving us the blessing of his guidance as he gathered the spiritual force necessary to catapult himself into his next phase of existence. At the time of his death, very few, if any, Christian dances had been received. The members of Khankah S.A.M. picked up Murshid's concentration on Christian sacred teachings when we moved to our original location on Fourteenth Street, right across the park from the Holy Order of MANS. Some of us began to go to shared functions with the members of the Order, inviting them again to our dances, and the wonderful old camaraderie of our early days with Murshid and Father Paul was revived. Saadi joined this work with gusto and became the central channel and successor to Murshid's vision of Christian mysticism with his translations of the Lord's Prayer and other teachings from the original Aramaic. The Amen Dance was inspired by this effort, by our Saturday Night Dance Class, and by the movie, "Lilies of the Field," with Sidney Poitier.

Murshid talked often about real spiritual knowledge, real light, actual shining. So much of our Western experience of Christianity lacks a living presence, particularly now when fundamentalism threatens to swallow the subtle beauty of the Christos and its original message of love. We, as children of tolerance and unity, should bring our experience of oneness into the forum of fundamentalism, so that our love and knowledge of the truth will draw the larger circle where all can find acceptance. Dancing together does it without preaching. We stretch out our hands to each other and the circle is joined. That is our legacy from Murshid, the living silsila.