

Memories of Murshid Samuel L. Lewis

by Abraham Sussman, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001

When I first wandered into Precita Park in San Francisco in 1969, barefoot and carefree, I had no idea how irrevocably my life was to be transformed by this event. Murshid S.A.M. was radiant and thirty of us danced with great joy on a Sunday afternoon. After the Dances I was ecstatic, a few feet above the ground. Murshid approached me and asked me who I was and where I lived. I told him I lived on planet earth in my VW bus. He snorted but went on asking me about my education. I told him I had studied literature and he asked who was my favorite writer? I reflected a moment and said, "I am." Murshid barked, "Ego!" and walked away, as I stood there, trembling.

This was the starting point in a lifelong project of self-effacement, or as Murshid Moineddin has said, "Uniting the one with the One." Dancing with Murshid required self-effacement because, the spiritual intensity of his concentration was greater than the personality self that anyone or I brought to the gathering. His simple entrainment, "Right foot, Left foot, Allah, Allah," was an invitation to enter an experience of joy and love. The price of admission was our mind and its menagerie of concepts. Murshid knew ecstasy from the inside. His Dances always lifted us from the denseness of the earth. At the same time, Murshid's presence carried a Zen stick to beat away foolishness and distraction.

Murshid S.A.M. was training us in group attunement. Whenever there was a lack of attention or concentration, Murshid would shout, "Stop the dance!" and we would begin again. When we chanted "Ram", Murshid was Ram. When we honored Muhammad, Murshid breathed Muhammad. When we called to Krishna, Murshid became Krishna, eyes twinkling and playing the flute. Dancing with Murshid, for me, was always uplifting and centering. Whatever moods or worries I would bring with me to the dance were quickly absorbed by the spiritual focus of Murshid's gaze. His magnetism was so strong and the reach of his heart so great that everyone felt welcome and included. He asked us only to pay attention and open our hearts.

What an invitation! Now thirty years later one marvels at the spread and development of these Dances. Recent Dances have rich melodies and sometimes elaborate and beautiful movements. But the original Dances of Murshid S.A.M. carry the exceptional baraka of Murshid's consciousness. While simple in structure, they offer an invitation to experience, in the body, head in the sound, feet on the ground, the profound mystery of ecstasy. The leader's attunement can be to Murshid himself; awakened heart and illumined mind. All the rest follows naturally.