

# *Background and Purpose of the Walks*

*by Wali Ali Meyer*



Murshid Samuel L. Lewis used to love to tell the story of going to see Ruth St. Denis and saying in his exuberant manner, “Mataji, I've got the secret to changing the world.”

“What's that, Samuel?” she replied.

“I'm going to teach children how to walk.”

He would then imitate the mature Miss Ruth rising from her chair and shouting, “You've got it! You've got it!”

In fact, the practices of Spiritual Walk, which were taught by Murshid Samuel Lewis and continued by his disciples and by teachers in the Dance Network, are a complete Yoga system. Through the Walks, the individual practitioner is able to progress through all stages of development by the use of breath, heart attunement, and concentration. It is the attunement aspect of it, that which can't be taught but has to be caught, that makes Walks practice most effective when the teacher has a transmission to share, confidently based on his or her own experience.

The whole idea of attunement, I think, gives the key to what is behind the Walking practices. If you look upon yourself as an instrument (now think of an instrument as either in tune or out of tune), you want to bring this instrument, which is your being, into attunement. How do we do this?

We do this by a variety of practices that allow us to strike our true note, and in order to do that we have to overcome fear and self-consciousness. We have to learn how to make sound; we have to learn how to direct sound. We have to learn how to displace and efface our consciousness into a greater consciousness so that when we think of beauty, we are not just us here thinking of beauty, we are merging with beauty, we are contemplating beauty, we are becoming that attribute of beauty.

By the same token, Murshid S.A.M. often compared his work with students of the Walks to entering a laboratory and objectively looking at the results of different experiments. There are no right or wrong answers, he would emphasize. Your experience is your experience. Because many of the Walks are geared towards helping a person discover natural and potent rhythms for and in one's life, a person might accidentally find such a rhythm in the midst of trying to do some other attunement practice. Thus Murshid would proudly say, “I have the only school in the world where you can pass by flunking.” He might then explain, “You flunked the Sun, but you just passed Neptune/Venus.”

People should be encouraged when doing these practices. It is not necessary to master all the Astrological Walks, for example, though that is an ultimate goal of the practice. Murshid S.A.M. would always point out that you only have to enter one door to enter the house. Perfect one rhythm, in other words.

The Astrological, Centering or Elemental Walks, while they have a sacred element to them that we are appreciating, are teaching us the ability to attune to and to move deliberately from state to state by our intention, by our breath and by the atmosphere. We are able to catch an atmosphere. The inner lesson that is being taught is to develop a full picture and not just to stay in one aspect of our being.

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The Walks of the Sifat-i-Allah (the attributes of God) provide a very visible link with the traditional, esoteric practice of the Sufi tarikats (mystical schools). For centuries, disciples in Sufism have been given the practice of reciting wazifas, each of which focus on one of the divine qualities. By contemplating the greatness and wonder of that quality, students rise in their realization of the presence of God. Murshid Samuel L. Lewis combined these contemplations with movement and musical accompaniment to evolve a practice especially suited for the active temperament of Westerners. By incorporating one's own body as the temple of God and by using movement to enhance the ecstatic mood, these Wazifa Walks became the first Dances of Universal Peace. The Ya Hayy Ya Haqq Dance is a good example.

The Tasawwuri Walks, walks of effacement in the great teachers of humankind, are always a kind of grace. The mood created in a meeting or class has a lot to do with whether that door may really be opened or not. All of the preliminary work naturally builds toward gaining the inner ability to do these Tasawwuri Walks. We learn to focus the breath, to naturally adopt and master different rhythms, to fully engage the different chakra or magnetic centers, and to trust in the flow of inspiration. Most of all we learn to take the attitude of the one who practices contemplation: we are a living part of That Which Is, and which is filled with wonder. To become fully released in this feeling is to do the walking practice called 'Akhlaq Allah': to feel absolutely free, to feel the presence of God within and without you, and to express the joy of that realization through spontaneous movement.

So the Walks become a world, a realm unto themselves. They offer us a whole course in spiritual development: concentration, breath practice, centering, self-effacement, attunement and devotion, which is the whole picture of a path. It was genius to develop the skillful means in order to use and develop these forms as a way of getting people to learn more about themselves, develop their latent powers and develop their God-like natures.