

Preface to the 2012 Edition

The project that became *Sufi Vision and Initiation* began as a simple work of service almost 40 years ago. It evolved into an incredible personal journey.

When I came to the Ruhaniat Sufi community in 1976, my teachers, Murshids Moineddin and Wali Ali, recognized an unregenerate intellectual, albeit with professional editing and writing skills. Rather than tell me, "stop all that," they put me to work.

One of the first projects Murshid Wali Ali gave me was to compare a galley version of Murshid Samuel Lewis' unpublished book *The Lotus and the Universe* with the original in order to check whether the editing done by the prospective publisher was accurate and faithful to the original. This involved two things: first, comparing, word for word, the original and the galley. In the pre-computer era, this was the editor's equivalent of Marpa asking Milarepa to build and then take apart a stone tower three times. Second, I needed to look up all of Murshid's references to people, places and events to see whether the changes that the publisher had made were accurate. Again, no Internet. The 'search engine' was me in the library using my research skills learned as a journalist.

In addition, Murshid wrote the book in response to Arthur Koestler's *The Lotus and the Robot* (1960) and made many references to it. So I read this book as well. Essentially, Koestler tried to make the case that all mystics are either phonies or charlatans, and that

Western science and secular culture had all of the answers we need today.

After many months' work, I reached several conclusions:

1) The editing was very inaccurate. The editor had changed Murshid's words and references willy-nilly, seemingly from ignorance about what Murshid was talking about. It would be better to start from scratch.

2) Koestler's book was already long out of print, and no one seemed interested in it, or his approach to debunking mysticism. On the contrary, *The Tao of Physics* (1975) had just been published, and the interest in the connection between science and mysticism was very high.

3) The polemical parts of Murshid's book were not very strong, and since Koestler was not really "on the radar," there seemed little reason to publish the book in its original form. On the other hand, the book contained many wonderful stories that Murshid relates about meeting and studying with his spiritual teachers, including Hazrat Inayat Khan, Nyogen Senzaki, Sokei-an Sasaki and others.

I then set out to discover whether he told these stories elsewhere in his writings and to find the best examples. That took me into his letters, of which Murshid kept carbon copies to serve as his diary. At the time I did my research, the letters were housed in multiple file cabinets in the basement of the Mentorgarten, Murshid's home in the Precita district of San Francisco. As I described in the introduction to the original edition of *Sufi Vision*, I felt drawn to compile Murshid's spiritual biography told in his own words rather than as "hagiography."

It was a long project that involved sorting through and deciphering the second and sometimes third carbon copies that Murshid kept of his correspondence. I came to recognize Murshid's various typewriters, as well as his typing eccentricities. For instance, one of his typewriters habitually skipped a space after the letter "h." This led to several mistaken readings that had crept into some early printed excerpts from his letters. For instance, Murshid reports that one of his Pakistani teachers appointed him as a representative of "Ch_isti" Sufism in the West, which was edited into "Christian Sufism."

Many times, I found references in Murshid's writing to letters or documents that were missing from the file. I began to use what I called "editorial dowsing," basically, breathing "Use us for the Purpose that Thy wisdom chooseth" and then letting my heart and hands do the searching through the file cabinets, trying to think as little as possible. Amazingly, I was invariably led to a missing document that had been misfiled, or in one case was printed on the reverse of an entirely different document (probably to save paper).

Again, in an era when computer scanning and OCR were only expensive dreams, compiling all of the texts involved typing them slowly into an early laptop computer with a screen five lines long, which saved files onto cassette tapes, about 10-15 typed pages at a time.

Then there was the question of editing Murshid's grammar or syntax. As those who have read him know, he had his own way of punctuating sentences and using words like "Now" at the

beginning of some of them. As a journalist, I had transcribed many interviews from tapes and adhered to the theory that the printed text should re-create the subject's speech pattern and rhythms as much as possible (this was the so-called "New Journalism" approach of Tom Wolfe and others in the 1970s). I began listening to tapes of Murshid, then reading all of the Murshid's texts aloud, getting into his speech and breath rhythm, and letting him direct me. The work gradually became much easier, and I began to receive a very deep inner connection with him. [For those grammarians who notice that the punctuation in Sufi Vision is still "non-standard," I was using the grammatical theory of Rudolf Flesch, one of the early proponents of "readability" and co-creator of the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test, which is now embedded in much word-processing software.]

The whole project lasted almost ten years, from start to finish. Two days still stand out for me.

First, in 1978, I was becoming disheartened by how long the whole process was taking. Late that year, along with 12 other mureeds, I went on a pilgrimage to Turkey, Pakistan and India to find the teachers of Murshid S.A.M. who were still alive and receive their blessing. Murshid Moineddin had asked us to do this, because he expected to die shortly of kidney failure, and he wanted Murshida Fatima Lassar, who was then his successor, to receive the blessing of Murshid's teachers.

Towards the end of the trip in February 1979, we met Pir Barkat Ali of Pakistan. From Murshid's correspondence with him, as well as from what people told us, the Pir was very conservative, and we had all learned the Salat prayers of Muhammad in order to be able to pray with him. He lived in the jungle outside Lahore in a

little village called Salarwala, where he had established an eye hospital for the benefit of the community. When Barkat Ali met us, as Murshida Fatima later described, he *became* Murshid Samuel Lewis. Not "acted like" him, but actually became him in a process that can only be described by the word *fana*. You can see a photo of him giving the darshan of Murshid S.A.M. in this book. He was also on silence.

Over the next several hours, he laughed and played with us, herding us around his mosque complex and generally baffling his followers. At one point, he took us into the mosque itself and began to throw pieces of bread to us. Then he brought out a typewriter and put it in front of me. He mimed dictating a letter and motioned to me to type. Of course, there was no paper in the typewriter, but I got the message.

Later he took us into his office, which was part of what you could call his "Qur'an refuge." He had put out the word for people to send him old, disused Qur'ans, which he lovingly rebound and then gave away to anyone who needed one. He wrote a message to us to say that if we prayed for something in the presence of all these Qur'ans, it would surely come true. I had already learned that praying for things was a mixed blessing, because you might get them. So I just prayed, "Use us for the Purpose that Thy Wisdom Chooseth." Really, at that point, I had no idea what was best for me or where my life was going.

After we returned, a year or so later, I was looking through the drawers of a bureau in the Mentorgarten office one afternoon and found, tucked away behind some folders, several cassette tapes. One was dated "October 2, 1968" and was a talk by Murshid that had never been transcribed. On it, he says:

I'm involved in two revolutions. One of them was when I told Ruth St. Denis:

"Mother, I'm going to start a revolution."

"What is it?"

"I'm going to teach little children how to walk."

"You have it! You have it! You have it!"

The second is to say the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic.

Murshid had started the Dances of Universal Peace and Walks. No one could remember him doing anything with the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic. This became a seed that I couldn't remove from my head or heart, which set me on a path of discovery that still continues today.

The one deficiency in *Sufi Vision* is the brevity of some of the excerpts from 1967 until Murshid's passing in 1971. Mansur Johnson's wonderful book *Murshid* (2006) has rectified this by giving us the context for a more complete selection of Murshid's letters during this period as well as a personal and moving description of what life with Murshid S.A.M. was really like--including the pain and struggle.

The diligence of later archivists and the generosity of the Sufi Ruhaniat International also brought another development in recent years: the scanning and archiving of most of the papers of Murshid Samuel Lewis, which can be found online at www.murshidsam.org. If it had been available in my day, it might

have cut years off doing *Sufi Vision*. Or maybe not, given that the editing process became linked with my own personal process.

If you read *Sufi Vision and Initiation*, you might wonder if the types of experiences Murshid Samuel Lewis describes are still possible today. Are there really are 'remarkable beings' to meet and remarkable experiences to have? Having travelled around the world over the last 36 years, I can tell you that there are. However, the spiritual path is not for the faint-hearted, and it is not Disneyland. If you're willing, like Murshid, to take on seemingly impossible projects in the name of service, to learn from both love and pain, all doors are open to you.

Ya Fatah! May Allah preserve Murshid's secret!

Peace and blessings,

Saadi Shakur Chishti,

Neil Douglas-Klotz

Edinburgh, Scotland

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