



## The International Headquarters of the Sufi Movement

Office of the Representative-General  
and the President of the International Publications Committee

The Message of Love, Harmony and Beauty is like a Divine stream of spiritual evolution flowing onwards through our daily lives in an awakening to purity and wisdom, which is the true essence of all that is understood by the term 'Sufi'.



To the kind attention of:  
All members of the International Sufi Movement

Date:  
April 30, 2008

Beloved Sufi brothers and sisters,

This is to kindly offer you some very positive news about our changing relationship with the Sufi Order International [SOI]. As you may be aware, tensions between our two groups have existed since the founding of the SOI by Pir Vilayat Inayat-Khan in the mid-50's, and while the mood has varied over the years and from place to place, the underlying divisions could not be forgotten or ignored. During the past year, though, a team from the ISM (Pir-o-Murshid Hidayat, Murshida Aziza, Murshid Karimbakhsh, Rani McLaughlin, Hamida Verlinden, Siddharta Rosdorff, Nawab Parnak) has met repeatedly with a team from the SOI (Pir Zia, Taj Inayat, Zahir Roehrs, Ishtar Dvorak, Fazl Terry Paey, Wali Ali Robbert van Bruggen, Hassan Suhrawardi Gebel) in an effort to overcome the differences and reconcile our organizations.

In the beginning, the meetings were not easy; the process required both sides to confront perceptions, suspicions and pains, admit errors and misconceptions, re-adjust attitudes and apologize for wrongs done and opportunities lost. Nevertheless, the common motive was to honour the spirit of harmony that is fundamental to the Sufi Message, and as we went forward and recognized each other's commitment to that motive, a genuine sense of trust and friendship began to grow amongst us. One of the products of our talks was a mutually agreed upon account of the history which led to the division, and that is included below.

The last series of reconciliation meetings took place at the Abode of the Message, in New Lebanon, and the real proof of what has been accomplished could be found in the warm-hearted and generous way in which we were subsequently hosted at the Federation Retreat by the SOI. Together with the other members and guests of the Federation, we met in an atmosphere of kindness, openness and respect, recognizing that every point of view can offer something valuable to the work of the Message. For the International Sufi Movement, one of the symbolic and moving highlights of the Retreat was the presentation of an excellent DVD about the Companions prepared by Hassan Suhrawardi Gebel of the SOI.

Another highlight was undoubtedly the joint signing of a proposal to the Egeling Stichting for a settlement that would be agreeable to the SOI and the ISM. Since the passing of Pir Vilayat, our relationship with the SOI has been complicated by a dispute between the ISM and the Stichting. We feel that the statutes of the Stichting are open to interpretation and, according to our belief, indicate that following the passing of Pir Vilayat the beneficiary of the fund should be the head of the Sufi

Movement. When the Board of the Stichting rejected this view in favour of Pir Vilayat's successor, Pir Zia, the ISM filed suit. Working together with the SOI, therefore, to find a mutually satisfactory strategy has been a very important step, requiring real trust and understanding, and we hope that with this proposal another obstacle to friendship has been cleared away.

For too long the Message of Love, Harmony and Beauty brought by Hazrat Inayat Khan has been followed by a shadow, and we are all deeply grateful that the light of truth may now begin to shine as it has been destined by Divine Providence. For the sake of that precious ideal which we feel as a sacred trust in our hearts, let us endeavour to show henceforth the harmony of which a true family is capable.

Pir-o-Murshid Hidayat Inayat-Khan

Murshid Karimbakhsh Witteveen

On behalf of the Sufi Movement members of the Reconciliation Group

## A Joint Account of the Separation into Two Streams of the Work of the Message By the SOI and ISM Reconciliation Teams

When Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan died unexpectedly at age 44, the question of who would succeed him as head of the Sufi Movement was a question to some. There was evidence from Murshida Saintsbury-Green that he had indicated his brother Maheboob Khan for this role, but Maheboob was reserved, had stayed in the background, and most mureeds hardly knew him. The absence of Pir-o-Murshid's radiant atmosphere and unquestioned authority left some adrift. They dreamed that someone would appear who could inspire their devotion. While they felt a deep devotion to Pir-o-Murshid's being and teachings, some representatives did not see in Maheboob Khan a leader in whom they could put their full confidence. Such senior mureeds tended to emphasize work for spreading the Message in the outer world. The brothers with their followers in the International Headquarters of the Sufi Movement attached the greatest importance to spiritual realization to be achieved in an attitude of trust and discipleship.

Over the 20 years that Shaikh-ul-Masheik Maheboob Khan modestly assumed the role of Representative General and Head of the Inner School, he won the hearts and devotion of most of the mureeds. There were some leaders, however, who acknowledged his leadership but remained dissatisfied. They formed a more or less loyal opposition.

Meanwhile it was acknowledged by almost all Sufi mureeds that it had been Pir-o-Murshid's wish that Vilayat should become Head of the Sufi Movement in the future. However, as we shall see, there were different interpretations of what this wish meant.

After WWII, during which there was a lull in the activity of the Sufi Movement, the summer schools which had taken place in Suresnes were now happening in Holland. During the War, Fazal Manzil and the Mureeds House had been occupied by the Germans and afterwards by French Colonial troops, and were in need of repair. Those who formed the loyal opposition, including Sirkar van Stolk and Elise Guillaume, had used the opportunity of broken connections between Headquarters and Suresnes to gain control of the Societe Anonyme Sufi (SAS) that owned the Sufi land and the Mureeds House in Suresnes. Now they rallied to the cause of restoring Suresnes and bringing back the summer school.

Vilayat has stated that Maheboob told him he was holding the position of Representative General until Vilayat would be ready, and would move him gradually into a role of leadership. However Vilayat had gone through a series of shattering events including wartime trauma and loss of sister, fiancée, and mother in quick succession, and so was not ready to assume any serious responsibilities. He spent a year recovering.

Just as Vilayat began to feel ready, however, the situation changed dramatically when Shaikh-ul-Mashaik Maheboob Kahn died unexpectedly of a heart attack and was succeeded by his cousin Pir-o-Murshid Ali Khan. Ali Khan was a mystic and gifted spiritual healer. He had a strong will and used it to protect the purity of Hazrat Inayat Khan's transmission. According to a biographer, Sitara Jironet, he believed that the Western mureeds did not understand the importance of respect for the authority of the head of the Movement and rebelled against it. He ended the period of Maheboob's diplomacy toward those who stood in opposition to Headquarters and insisted on loyalty toward the head of the organization. Sitara believes that he ruled with an "iron hand" because he saw a danger for the survival of the Movement if authority were to remain lax.

The unfolding of circumstances that led to Vilayat's departure from the Sufi Movement and the forming of the Sufi Order was complex and included many events and factors.

Vilayat welcomed Ali Khan's leadership, recognizing him as Representative General, and expressing a wish to be trained by him to prepare himself for his future role. But when it came to that training, a conflict arose. Ali Khan came from a tradition that insisted on an attitude of discipleship as a condition for spiritual training. He therefore made as a condition for accepting Vilayat as a disciple: "no claim." While it was generally recognized that Hazrat Inayat Khan had expressed a wish that his son should "walk in his shoes," not everyone believed the wish would automatically be fulfilled. According to Mahmood Khan, Ali Khan felt that Vilayat's training should be completely divorced from the expectation to achieve a position but wished at the same time to train Vilayat for the mystical realization required of the role. For the wish to become an authentic reality, Vilayat needed to undergo the kind of strict training which Ali Khan had received from Inayat Khan. Vilayat must have felt that the succession was not so much a right as a duty to fulfill. At the age of 16, when he was reminded of his father's wish by Murshida Fazal Mai Egeling, he knelt down like a knight and pledged his life to serving the Message. He has said that he could not relinquish the duty he felt had been entrusted to him.

It is likely that Vilayat sincerely sought to be trained by Ali Khan but did not regard their relationship as teacher and disciple. His brother Hidayat has remarked that the children of Inayat Khan were trained in meditation by their father at an early age and considered him to be their true spiritual guide and teacher.

Vilayat refused Ali Khan's condition, but each continued to seek a way around this difficulty, ultimately without success.

The conflict became difficult to solve because there was a deep cultural difference between them. Ali Khan was very Eastern and Vilayat was half Western; Ali Khan had an Eastern education, while Vilayat followed Western studies; Ali Khan kept apart from politics as a mystic, while Vilayat became involved in the War and in politics. And during their youth, contact between Inayat Khan's children and his brothers had been limited.

The conflict then culminated in a crisis that arose around an attempt to save the field opposite Fazal Manzil in Suresnes. In 1950 the Mayor of Suresnes gave notice to the SAS, which had taken the responsibility for the property in Suresnes, that the unused field would be expropriated for badly needed post-war low-cost housing. The opposition group that had gained control of the SAS developed an approach to saving the land by gaining outside support for building a student house on the land that could at the same time provide a space for a Universel. Another team sent by Headquarters developed a different approach by negotiating with the local authorities to salvage part of the land with the Lecture Hall. Each group sincerely believed their plan to be the best hope for saving the land. One team saw the other team's involvement as clumsy interference and the other team saw the first team's work as a hopeless pipedream. As loss of the land became imminent, the Suresnes group sent a furious open letter to all mureeds accusing Headquarters of selling off the sacred land. As Vilayat had taken a prominent role with the Suresnes group, this further alienated Ali Khan.

If one examines the letters written at that time which have been preserved, it becomes clear that each side was doing its best to attempt to save the property. Their methods were so different that any chance of collaboration was frustrated from the start. This experience greatly heightened the distrust which had already been building between Headquarters and the Suresnes group.

The relationship between Ali Khan and Vilayat then continued to deteriorate. Vilayat began teaching in earnest in European cities and attracted large audiences. It was a great disappointment however for Ali Khan that Vilayat did not do things in the Sufi Movement way. Therefore Vilayat was received coldly in some European centers. At the Summer School in The Hague in 1955 he was denied his role as head of the Confraternity to lead the prayers as he had done for many years. Thus Vilayat got the impression that he was being eased out of the Sufi Movement, and would not be allowed to assume leadership as he had expected to do one day.

After the summer school of 1955, Vilayat appealed to mureeds to follow his leadership and asserted his claim of succession in the Executive Committee of the Sufi Movement in Geneva. After the ensuing split most of the mureeds of the Sufi Movement remained with the Movement while some of the leaders opposed to Headquarters joined Vilayat. Vilayat never abandoned the idea that he was the rightful heir of his father's organization. He went on to attract a dynamic new group of mureeds who felt called by the Message and the being of Pir-o-Murshid.

The ISM and the SOI have continued to draw new members and to preserve and disseminate the teachings left by Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan. The determination of the ISM to preserve the original form of the teachings has allowed the SOI the freedom to innovate and develop its own style. Of greatest importance to the ISM has been the work of spiritual realization through discipleship. The SOI has perhaps put more emphasis on the spreading of the Message through seminars and conferences with the public. Each organization has made its unique contribution to the work. We can now look forward toward the future with the hope of mutual love and support, affirming the strengths of each organization and finding ways to work and celebrate together.