



**Jubileumnummer van de Soefigedachte, september 2010  
De Soefi Beweging – een bewogen geschiedenis door Karimbakhsh Witteveen**

**The Jubilee Edition of the Dutch Magazine Soefigedachte (Sufi Thought)  
The Sufi Movement – an eventful history by Karimbakhsh Witteveen**

**The Sufi Movement - an eventful history - Karimbakhsh Witteveen<sup>1</sup>**

*The history of the Sufi Movement has been stirring. That could come as a surprise because the Sufi message is aimed at harmony and unity. But, apart from light and beauty there have been tensions and conflicts. In order to be able to understand this, we have to be aware of the fact that the message also brought with it essential elements concerning spiritual discipleship and hierarchy, which did not easily fit into the western individualistic, rationalistic and democratic culture. In that sense it was also a revolutionary and renewing message.*

The work of Hazrat Inayat Khan for the Sufi Movement began to unfold strongly during the summer schools which were held during three months in Wissous (1921) and Katwijk (1922) respectively and after that always in Suresnes near Paris (1923-1926). Murshida Fazal May Egeling bought a beautiful house for him in which he could live with her and his family. The open field across was bought by the Sufi Movement and on it a little lecture building was built. Those summer schools became a phenomenon where the message started to manifest in a divine current. Many lectures were worked up and published in books. Innumerable interviews solved questions and problems like magic, sometimes in just a few minutes' time. The meditative evenings, the sung Zikar and the khilwat silences were of a fathomless depth. Mureeds who have attended to these unforgettable summer schools, witness of an atmosphere that was so light that many of them felt as if raised above themselves. They lived in a heavenly intoxication. Here the Sufi message really grew wings.

Yet, even then in this clear sky there were some clouds. In 1925 the resistance he faced during meetings of the board on organization, financing and the right to vote in the Movement was a deep disappointment for the Master. He was hurt because this attitude was so different from the devotion the disciples of the East mostly showed. That was a common problem too. In his autobiography he complains that it was so difficult to bring his western disciples to that point where a disciple in the East often begins. The biggest disappointment was that his mureeds did not manage to build on the territory of Suresnes the universal temple of which he dreamt. This would be paid for dramatically later on.

Of course the greatest blow came when Hazrat Inayat Khan died unexpectedly in India at February 5 1927, where he had searched for rest and inspiration. Whereas his mureeds fell back on earth shocked and dazed his will in which he had designated his successor and which he had entrusted to Murshida Sharifa Goodenough turned out to be burnt by her in a fit of mental confusion. That was a heavy blow which would make itself felt for a long time. Why did this happen? Maybe the marvelous light of the message attracted a dark opposing force which tested the confused Sufi community that was without a leader now.

Fortunately, there were indications that the Master had thought of his eldest brother Maheboob. The other two 'companions', Mohammed Ali Khan and Musharaf Khan, completely backed up the choice for Maheboob. Maheboob himself waited modestly; but his deep mystic power, his attunement to Inayat Khan and an inner vision gradually melted the opposition and insecurity. Though some leaders dissociated from the Movement – in the United States and in the Netherlands Sirdar van Tuyl, who had been the secretary of Inayat Khan – a new phase in the development of the Sufi Movement could start.

## **THE LEADERSHIP OF SHAIKH-ul-MASHAIKH MAHEBOOB KHAN**

Maheboob did not use the title Pir-o-Murshid because by many it was strongly associated with Hazrat Inayat Khan, but he used the equivalent designation of Shaikh-ul-Mashaikh. His leadership was characterized by pursuing harmony. He was careful and tactful. And that was exactly what was needed in this period of differences in processing the message.

The summer schools in Suresnes went on regularly from 1927 until 1939. A great inspiration remained in the study of Inayat Khan's lectures and in the meditation evenings there was a strong atmosphere. There was joy and humor, friends were being made and friendships were being deepened. The work of publishing and translating the volumes which contained lectures of Inayat Khan more and more primed. And many Sufis returned to their countries to spread the message there.

Yet, gradually Shaikh-ul-Mashaikh and a number of the leaders who were rather gifted in a worldly sense drifted apart in a certain way.

Maheboob often said that it was of little use to try and spread the Sufi message when the inner qualities of the worker would not first be improved.<sup>2</sup> Therefore he focused himself primarily on inner deepening. He reserved much time of the day – often together with Mohammed Ali Khan – for meditation. Thus he continually gathered the inner strength and inspiration which enabled him to do his work and which also radiated more and more into the Movement. At the same time he insisted upon the maintenance of the Sufi message in its pure form.

Unfortunately not all leaders, who had been initiated and inspired by Hazrat Inayat Khan in person, opened their mind to that inner guidance of Shaikh-ul-Mashaikh. They had the feeling they had received so much of Inayat Khan that they wanted to devote themselves to the spreading of the message. The drifting apart that originated in this way was understandable psychologically, but was a serious threat for the unity of the Movement.

During the Second World War the German occupier prohibited the Sufi Movement, so that the work was at a standstill. Shaikh-ul-Mashaikh and Murshid Ali Khan were interned.

## **THE LEADERSHIP OF PIR-o-MURSHID MOHAMMED ALI KHAN**

Maheboob Khan died quite unexpectedly in 1948. He had not designated a successor, so the executive committee of the Sufi Movement had to choose a new leader. It was commonly agreed that Mohammed Ali Khan with his great warmth, power and mystic realization was the right person for taking over the leadership.

Vilayat, the oldest son of Hazrat Inayat Khan, whom many considered to be the future leader, wrote to the executive committee that he wholeheartedly supported the appointment of Mohammed Ali Khan, but hoped that he would be trained by Mohammed Ali Khan for his future leadership. But when Vilayat visited Murshid Ali Khan to talk about his training, Murshid Ali Khan said: 'You must first give up your claim!' He considered the inner letting go of that claim as the essence of mystic training. Vilayat did not agree. Thus the training never primed.

In the meantime Mohammed Ali Khan developed into a very special leader. He possessed a great purity and with it was always strongly focused on God. With his beautiful deeply passionate singing he touched many Sufis to tears and he performed amazing spiritual healings, in which he forgot himself completely and became a pure channel of the Divine healing power. Outwardly he experienced more and more trouble in seeing, but inwardly he was clairvoyant and he saw that the dangerous separation of some mureeds from the spiritual guidance asked for healing. That separation of a group of Sufi's crystallized in Suresnes, where the local council wanted to disown the Sufi territory for house-building. A discord aroused about the possibilities to prevent this disowning completely or for a small part. Both efforts failed. The emotions of the 'Suresnes group' rose so high and were directed so much against the leadership of the Sufi Movement that it splintered off. Vilayat, who lived in Suresnes, completely supported the Suresnes group and declared that he wanted to take over the leadership of the Sufi Movement. That was not accepted by Pir-o-Murshid Ali Khan and the executive committee of the Sufi Movement. A group around Gâweri Voûte united in Sufi Contact but did not follow Vilayat. Vilayat Khan established the Sufi Order. The majority of the Sufis remained faithful to Murshid Ali Khan.

This was the most painful and shocking experience in the whole history of the Sufi Movement. But with his inner strength and faith in God Mohammed Ali Khan had guided the Movement through this crisis and had affirmed the hierarchy and the spiritual leadership. When the task had been fulfilled he died in 1958 after a short illness.

### **RESTORATION UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF PIR-o-MURSHID MUSHARAFF KHAN**

Mohammed Ali Khan did leave a will in which Mahmood Khan was designated as successor, but this would be so 'when he has finished his studies and is ready for it. Murshid Musharaff Khan should take full charge' until that moment. According to that the executive committee appointed Murshid Musharaff Khan the new leader of the Sufi Movement. Mahmood Khan reconciled himself to it.

Musharaff Khan came at the right moment. With his warm personality he focused on restoring the harmony within the shocked Movement. He had a talent to put people at ease and thus exercise great influence.

In this way he brought about unity.<sup>3</sup> Salima van Braam, the leader of the Amsterdam Sufi Center, who had kept aloof from the leadership, returned and friendly contacts originated with the Center in the Anna Paulownastraat, which had splintered off in 1931 under the guidance of Sirdar van Tuyll.

Later on, that would bear fruit, so that the unity would restore here too.

Musharaff was the first leader to give an important role to his wife Shahzadi, whom he initiated as Murshida and to whom he thus gave an esoteric task. At several domains he received special help from her. Thus there came more peace in the Movement and the sustained wounds could heal.

In 1967 Musharaff wanted to go to India because he longed for his native country. But on the morning shortly before his departure he did not feel well. He had to lie down and silently and unexpectedly fell asleep forever.

### **REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES UNDER MURSHID FAZAL INAYAT KHAN**

Murshid Musharaff had not stated his thoughts about his succession in a will. He only had told Shahzadi a few things of which she had made notes. He wanted Fazal Inayat Khan, the grandson of Hazrat Inayat Khan, with whom he had made deep contact during an American journey, to be his successor. Therefore the executive committee invited Fazal to take the heavy task of leadership upon him, despite the protest of Mahmood Khan who, without success for that matter, referred to the earlier will of Murshid Ali Khan. Fazal Inayat Khan had built a beautiful life in America with his wife and two children and rather wanted to stay there, so that I had to take much trouble to convince him that he had to make this sacrifice for the Sufi message. Pir-o-Murshid Fazal came and from the very start he devoted himself completely to the Sufi Movement. He brought revolutionary changes. He attracted many younger mureeds whom he wanted to give deep experiences, free from the traditional ties and limitations of their parental milieu. He moved into the house Four Winds, in South England, which two English mureeds gave to him. He named it Abadan Abat 'from everlasting to everlasting' and gave the freedom of it to many of his young followers. The meetings he organized became quite different and characteristic in nature than the usual gatha and study classes. They were more focused on experience, with music, singing, tambura and harmonium and sometimes periods of fasting. Deep friendships originated.

Shortly after his appointment the building of the Universel Murad Hasil in Katwijk was finished. Also at this site special meetings were organized: 'work camps', with activities that were often a challenge to the ego, with meditation evenings, for example the 'communal invocation' where each participant received a personal practice which he or she had to continue without being disturbed by others. This provided a great concentration and a very deep atmosphere. His work for the improvement of the Dargah, the tomb of Inayat Khan in India, was also important. He lived in Delhi for a while so that he came to know the Muslims who lived around the tomb. We were able to buy the land around it little by little and to make a beautiful memorial building. Especially Wali and Walia van Lohuizen have contributed to this.

As a personal training he gave difficult assignments (chillahs) who often gave what one needed psychologically. He was very intuitive and creative in all of this, but for some he went too far. Murshida Shahzadi established a tariqa for them, a circle where she gave inspiring guidance, more according to the earlier lines.

Mostly younger mureeds gathered round Fazal, like a family. In some respects Fazal began to deviate gradually from the Sufi message. At a certain point he went off to Germany; he left to take over the management of the factory of Ulma's father – Ulma was a mureed with whom he had a deep, intimate affair and so he had to help her. In that way he could hardly lead the Sufi Movement anymore. So I went to Germany to discuss this with him. There he told me I had to take over the leadership of the Sufi Movement as Representative General. He wanted to keep the leadership of the Sufi activities to himself. That would be difficult for me; I would have to talk it through with him. But then an important initiative of unity came about: Pir Vilayat and Murshid Hidayat wanted to gather the various Sufi groups in order to come to a unity. In that way the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hazrat Inayat Khan's birthday would be celebrated.

### **THE BOARD OF LEADERS AND PIR-o-MURSHID HIDAYAT INAYAT KHAN**

It soon turned out that the unity that had been pursued enthusiastically did not work. Eventually a board of leaders remained consisting of Murshida Shahzadi, Murshid Hidayat, Shaikh-ul-Mashaikh Mahmood Khan, who also had a circle of mureeds of his own, me as Representative General and my wife Ratan. Murshid Fazal withdrew in order to make the cooperation easier. Now and then he participated in a meeting of the board of leaders. Later, at the instigation of his younger mureeds, he established a separate organization: the Sufi Way.

The board of leaders has worked very well. Thus Murshid Hidayat was able to get acquainted with the work of the Sufi Movement and infuse it with his inspiration. When the desire aroused in 1992 to return to a leadership of one person I handed the function of Representative General over to him. That was the beginning of a very close cooperation between the both of us.

Until now – so a very long time - Pir-o-Murshid has led and in doing so has made a few valuable contributions. As a musician and composer he brought deep inspiration in the zikr-meditation by the accompaniment he made to Inayat Khan's melody, so that it became easier for all mureeds to sing along. The zikr was performed in four parts. That provided a very strong atmosphere. He also wrote the music for wazifa's and he worked a lot with breathing practices, to which he added a few practices from the yoga tradition. This was all a great stimulant for the Inner School. Furthermore, Pir-o-Murshid established a warm contact with the Sufi Ruhaniat Order in the United States, which had developed from the work of Murshida Rabia Martin and Samuel Lewis after the passing away of Hazrat Inayat. In 1997 this led to the establishment of the 'Federation of the Sufi Message' that was focused on working together on a friendly footing. In it the separate organizations would be free in their work and would not impose anything upon the others. In 2004, after the passing away of Pir Vilayat, the attempt to come to unity with the International Sufi Order eventually led to reconciliation with his successor, Pir Zia. At that moment we could recognize from both sides that especially psychological differences had been the basis of the former conflicts and we could recognize each others' spiritual leaders.

The International Sufi Order is now joined the Federation of the Sufi Message, just like Soefi Contact and Fraternity of Light, so that we can celebrate together the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sufi message in 2010.

### **PIR-o-MURSHID COUNCIL**

For the future it is important that Murshid Hidayat Khan has given up the title Pir-o-Murshid and infused it into a Pir-o-Murshid Council, which brings together the different leaders of the five Sufi activities and the Representative General in order to, in attunement to Hazrat Inayat Khan, consider important ideas and decisions. In that way more Sufi leaders were being involved more intensely in the leadership of the movement – a more democratic element. The problems concerning succession which bothered the Sufi Movement so much in the past can thus be solved easier in the future.

With it, after an eventful history, the path seems open for a harmonious cooperation between the different Sufi

organizations. We can be very thankful for that, but at the same time we have to remain aware that this harmony which is gained in such a troublesome way has to be cherished again and again in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Karimbaksh Witteveen (1921) is born in a Sufi family and has been initiated when he was eighteen years old. Since more than fifty years he is holding office on the committee in the Sufi Movement. At this moment he is, next to Murshid Hidayat Khan, co-representative general. A more elaborated version of this history, written by him at the request of the editorial staff, is to be found in the archive of the Sufi Movement at the Banstraat in The Hague.

<sup>2</sup> *Sufi Mysticism into the West*. Dr. Karin Jironet, p. 70. Interview with Mahmood Khan. Peeters 2009.

<sup>3</sup> *Sufi Mysticism into the West*. Dr. Karin Jironet, p. 152 – 156. Peeters 2009.

*Our gratitude to Ameen Carp, Director of the Publications Committee for the International Sufi Movement, for permission to translate and reprint these articles.*

**Translation by Alima Mooijman, [Alima@sufimovement.us](mailto:Alima@sufimovement.us)**

International Sufi Movement-USA-Midwest Region <http://www.sufimovement.us/>

International Sufi Movement-USA-Midwest Region Translation Team <http://www.sufimovement.us/workers.htm>

[http://sufimovementusenglishtranslations.blogspot.com/2011/01/sufi-movement-eventful-history\\_24.html](http://sufimovementusenglishtranslations.blogspot.com/2011/01/sufi-movement-eventful-history_24.html)