

# SUCCESSION

## MURSHIDA RABIA MARTIN AND THE PASSING OF HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN

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### Introduction

Now that Baba's Mandali have joined him, the worldwide Meher Baba community is possibly unique spiritually in that there is no formal hierarchy, no paid administrators, and no advertised focal point, other than Meher Baba and the various 'Baba centers' around the world. There is one exception, however, and that is the order of Sufism Reoriented. They have a living Murshid(a) (guide or teacher), a tight, hierarchical organization and require murids (students) to obtain residence in one of their two Sufi centers in North America.

How did Sufism Reoriented come about?

In 1910, under orders from his Murshid, the Indian Chishti musician Hazrat Inayat Khan sailed to America to spread the message of Sufism in the West. He encountered Mrs. Ada Martin in San Francisco, who became his first Western murid, and who was trained by him as a Murshida. Khan spent most of the next sixteen years in Europe and England, where he founded a dozen or more spiritual centers. After his sudden death in India in 1927, there was a three-year struggle within Khan's organization, mostly regarding the legitimacy of Murshida Martin's claim that she had been appointed Inayat Khan's spiritual successor in the West. She was ultimately rejected. She and her murids then spent another thirteen years in relative isolation in America, until Martin discovered the existence of Meher Baba in the early 1940s. She became convinced he was the ranking spiritual leader of this age, corresponded heavily with him, and offered the control of her two spiritual groups in California to Meher Baba. In 1952, several years after Martin's death, Meher Baba, Martin's successor Ivy O. Duce and murid Don Stevens created the charter of Sufism Reoriented. This oriented Martin's groups toward Meher Baba, not the Prophet Muhammad, as the Perfect Man.

### New Information

When considering the roots of the Sufism Reoriented movement, I have heard and read that the reason Murshida

Rabia Martin was denied her proper place as the inheritor of Hazrat Inayat Khan's mantle was the prejudice of the Indian Muslim brothers and cousins of Inayat Khan. It is claimed they denied Martin because she was American, a woman, and a Jew. Add the apparent absurdity of claiming that Inayat's son Vilayat, all of eleven years old at Inayat's death, was an initiated Khalif, and the case for Martin and against those prejudiced Muslim males seems complete. Knowing the period, and the deeply held beliefs of Muslims, even advanced Sufis, this explanation seems to hold up over time. Take also in account that at the time of his passing in 1927 women in America had the right to vote for only seven years. A Jewish female head of a Sufi order in America shows Khan's incredibly advanced attitude, which his male, Muslim relatives might not have shared.

This paper will attempt to make Khan's Sufi Order's rejection of Murshida Martin more understandable, using sources including letters from Meher Baba, articles from Sufism Reoriented, and finally a very interesting source, Inayat Khan's grandson Pir Zia Inayat Khan, the head of the present-day Sufi Order International and Sufi Movement. Pir Zia's 377-page doctoral dissertation, presented at Duke University in 2006 towards a Ph.D in religion, is titled "*A Hybrid Sufi Order at the Crossroads of Modernity: the Sufi Order and Sufi Movement of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan*," and is the history of Inayat Khan's life and

A HYBRID SUFI ORDER

AT THE CROSSROADS OF MODERNITY:  
THE SUFI ORDER AND SUFI MOVEMENT  
OF PIR-O-MURSHID INAYAT KHAN

by

Zia Inayat-Khan

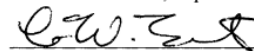
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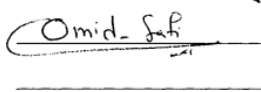
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carries the story up to the present day. I feel it is a valuable document, a view from the inside, so to speak. It draws upon archives in India, Europe and the United States, and, most interesting to me, on the archives of Sufism Reoriented in Walnut Creek. A primary source for Pir Zia was the voluminous correspondence between Inayat Khan and Rabia Martin.

The dissertation begins with a brief history of the Chishti Order in India, then veers away to European spirituality including the Theosophical movement and Madame Blavatsky, and the phenomenon of Swami Vivekenanda.

### Inayat Khan's Early Days

Inayat Khan's musical development began early, being born into an accomplished musical family accustomed to playing for luminaries such as the Nizam of Hyderabad. Inayat's instrument was the vina, a stringed instrument played similarly to a sitar. His singing and playing placed him high in the musical hierarchy of Baroda.

Inayat was initiated and trained in the four Indian 'tariqas' or Sufi Orders - Chishti, Naqshbandi, Suhrawardi, and Qadiri. Abu Hashim Madani, his own murshid, also initiated into multiple Orders, presented himself and trained his murids as a Chishti.

Within the Sufi organizations he founded, Inayat's story is construed to distance him from a pure Chishti or Islamic tradition. A biographical essay published by the Sufi Movement in 1964 contends:

"Although his own Murshid and initiator (Madani) belonged to the Chishtiyya order of Sufis, Hazrat Inayat Khan *cannot, strictly speaking, be considered as a link between Chishti teaching and the West*, for neither his origin nor his education, culture, or esoteric training should obscure the fact that the essence of the Sufism he taught is the *product of his individual achievement and originality*." (italics mine.)

A few years ago the website of the European Sufi Movement had a detailed description of the heart-with-wings emblem adopted quite early by Inayat Khan. This emblem depicted a crescent moon and star (symbolic of Islam, or surrender) within a winged heart. The esoteric meaning is 'the surrendered heart grows wings'. The description on the website omitted any mention of Islam or even the Chishti Order.

Pir Zia's dissertation states the young Inayat, already a world-class musician, was given an 'injunction' by his Chishti Murshid, Sayyid Abu Hashim Madani of



Hazrat Inayat Khan



Abu Hashim Madani

Hyderabad. Madani granted Inayat a 'certificate of succession', known as an 'ijazat nama' or 'khilafat-nama' in 1907 and instructed him to travel to the West and disseminate the Sufi wisdom. However, Inayat did not depart for America for three more years, doing local pilgrimages and spending his time touring South India, Ceylon and Burma, recording music, and settling in Calcutta. The dissertation refers to a biography where Inayat's son and successor Vilayat wrote:

"When the time of his passing was nigh, Khwaja (master) Madani made Inayat Khan his successor in the Chain of Sufis, saying he had received from Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (founder of the Order in India, d. 1236CE) instructions to tell him he was missioned to carry the Sufi Message to the West."

Note the disparity here. In one case above we are told that Inayat is NOT to be construed as carrying the Chishti torch to the West, essentially, because of his strong individuality. Yet here is Inayat's own son Vilayat claiming the most traditionally Sufi injunction of all, a command from the founder of the Order in India and what is now Pakistan.

### The West and Meeting Rabia Martin

After his father passed on in 1910, Inayat booked passage to New York with his brother Maheboob Khan and cousin Muhammad Ali Khan. This departure from India was later called 'Hejirat Day' in the Sufi Movement and gives us an inkling of the stature of Inayat in the later Sufi view. This anniversary deliberately invokes the Prophet Muhammad's 'hejira' from Mecca to Medina.

It was also later termed "the birthday of the Message." A "prophetic resonance," as Pir Zia wrote.

Khan's musical troupe "The Royal Musicians of Hindustan" traveled with a famous dancer, Ruth St. Denis, across America to San Francisco. The group parted ways with St. Denis, as Inayat felt American audiences had, in that company, considered them mere entertainment.





The Royal Musicians of Hindustan circa 1910: Ali Khan, Inayat Khan, Musheraff Khan and Maheboob Khan



Murshida Rabia Martin

Khan was soon invited to speak at San Francisco's Vedanta Temple, where Mrs. Ada Martin first heard him, on Easter Sunday afternoon April 16, 1911. She followed the group to their next concert. Pir Zia wrote, "Soon thereafter Inayat initiated her as his first murid, granted her the honorary name (*laqab*) Rabia, and began her training. This was the beginning of Inayat Khan's Sufi work..." In other words, the actual Work in the West began with this one person's recruitment. Pir Zia continued,

"Several others were initiated in the wake of Martin, but *she was to remain Inayat Khan's primary student and prospective representative in America.*" (italics mine.)

Pir Zia's dissertation Chapter Three, "The Genesis of the Sufi Order, 1910-1920," is spent describing the circumstances of Rabia and Inayat's meeting and the development of her spirituality under his guidance-by-letter. It is also clear that by late 1911, Inayat already considered her the front-runner as his successor in America. No other American murids are even mentioned in this chapter by Pir Zia, except Samuel Lewis, who appears only as a witness and sometime-secretary to Martin.

Pir Zia describes the intense exchange of letters between Rabia and Inayat, in which Inayat began instructing her in standard Chishti training, such as so many Zikr (repetitions of the names of God) daily, watching the heart, etc. Pir Zia reports on Martin's progress in some detail:

"By the end of 1911 Martin had received instructions in all of the basic practices. Inayat wrote (her), 'You have now to continue your practice of wayalat [*'amal*] with Zikr, Fikr (silent repetitions), shagal and darood forever.' The focus of his letters now shifted to the mission of establishing Sufism in America, and Martin's important role in this. From New York he wrote: '...I want somebody to undertake my mission as my successor in America before I would leave (for Europe) ... I find you the most suited of my murids ... All this shows that God almighty and all Murshids

in Chain\* have selected you to bestow upon you this honour..." \*(*'chain'* is a direct translation of the Arabic-Sufi term '*silsila*,' the Sufi succession back to 'Ali and the Prophet.)

Pir Zia then states:

"...it is evident that ... Rabia Martin in particular received an intensive and systematic course of esoteric training that *differed little in form from the Sufism practiced among Chishti initiates in India.*" (italics mine.)

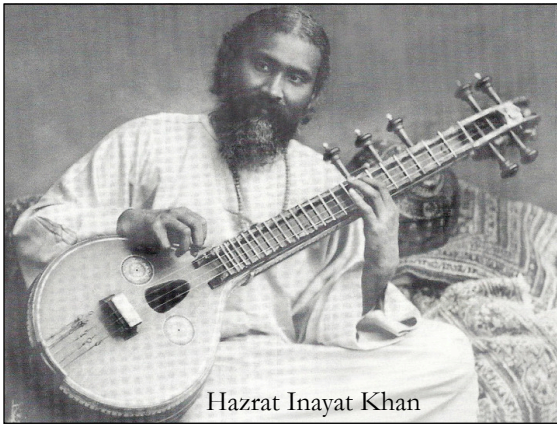
Inayat spent little time in California, and most of his subsequent years were in Britain and France, leaving Rabia and her group isolated, teaching a traditional Muslim Chishti spirituality; Inayat had instructed Rabia to learn Arabic and study the Qur'an.

### Building Sufism in Britain and Europe

Chapter Three then follows Inayat Khan to Britain in 1912, and gives a background for what Pir Zia terms "Occidental Sufism," and the formation of the 'Sufi Order In The West' in London, 1917. He discusses the inherent contradictions of introducing Indian - Islamic Sufism into a "secular Christian milieu."

The influence of the West grew perceptibly on Inayat personally and on his methods of imparting the Message to the West. In 1913 Ora Ray Baker arrived in London. She was a cousin of the founder in America of the Christian Science movement, Mary Baker Eddy. Ora Ray was dubbed 'Pirani Ameena Begum' (Female master, Knower, and Princess) by Inayat and they married that same year. Inayat began meeting well-regarded artists, musicians and royalty, and wrote to Rabia, "I have already started the Sufi movement in Paris and now I am going to spread it in England." A meeting with Claude Debussy led to an invitation for his group, the Royal Musicians of Hindustan, to play in Russia, where Inayat "...lectured to large audiences and was widely introduced in musical circles."

During this period Inayat and his extended family lived in Addison Road in London. Brothers and cousin Maheboob, Mohammed Ali, Musharaff, and Inayat's new wife Ameena Begum were all trained intensively by Inayat, and were considered to be the core of the Sufi Movement in England. This group was essentially stranded in London when WWI broke out, temporarily severing ties with groups in Europe and Russia. They moved to another London home in 1915, which was dubbed the Khanaqah (headquarters) of the Sufi Order. Two of Inayat's four children were born during the war, Vilayat in 1916, Hidayat in 1917, then Khair-un-nisa just afterward in 1919. A close



friend of the family at that time, Gujarat native Abdullah Yusuf Ali, later gained fame in the Muslim world as a translator of the Qur'an.

However, the Western influence continued. Pir Zia notes that "beginning in 1915, 'God' began to replace 'Allah' in Inayat's articles [in 'The Sufi', their English periodical]," and "...as time progressed Islamic references consistently diminished in all of the Order's publications." In 1920 Inayat wrote to Rabia Martin:

"... by experience I can work with the Western people much better than before. I have studied their psychology and I know what they like and what they do not like and how to approach them on these subjects and therefore I have been lately successful too."

One possible reason for the diminished role of Muslim terminology, Pir Zia proposes, was rising anti-Islamic sentiment among the English due to the failed Gallipoli campaign in 1915, shortly after the London Khanaqah was formed. Hostility toward the Turks extended to all things Islamic and was fanned by the press. Rabia and her group, isolated in America and Australia, were not exposed to this Westward slide of the Sufi movement.

During the war years Inayat spread the Order in the British Isles through lectures and appearances, sometimes hosted by various local Theosophical Society groups. Small lodges opened in Harrogate, Southampton, Tottenham (later home of the Who), Brighton, and Luton.

Pir Zia points out in the very next paragraph that Rabia Martin "... was making progress in San Francisco. In 1918 she opened a center on Sutter Street, and a second center, Kaaba Allah, in rural Marin County." In the dissertation, along with the history of Inayat Khan's travels and creation and dissolution of groups, Pir Zia never loses sight of Rabia Martin. He often indicates what's going on in Inayat's

mind by including excerpts from a massive volume of correspondence between them from 1911 to his death in 1927. Pir Zia gives more attention to Rabia Martin than any individual besides Inayat Khan himself. Inayat's regard for Rabia Martin is never downplayed by Pir Zia, neither overtly by editorializing nor covertly by omitting her from the narrative.

At the end of WWI in late 1918, Inayat and extended family incorporated the Sufi Trust Limited. The group had been appealing for a building to be used as a "permanent Khanaqah" (center), and a wealthy murid donated the lease on a "palatial property" at 29 Gordon Square in central London. This center soon dissolved due to financial disputes.

### A Universal Church

Possibly in reaction, in 1919, Inayat moved his family to Tremblay, France. He determined that the Sufi Order's new international headquarters should be established in Geneva. Pir Zia sees a connection between this move of the Sufis to Geneva and the transfer of the League of Nations from London to Geneva. Following the brutal and murderous War to End All Wars, the League of Nations was then seen as the hope and promise of world peace.

Sufi Order membership in Britain and Europe grew slowly in this first decade. Pir Zia characterizes it as:

"... the result of many factors. Muslims soon felt uncomfortable within the Order's quasi-religious but not specifically Islamic framework. Jews and Christians were sometimes ill at ease with the Order's hybrid mix of Theosophy and Islam. Theosophists were attracted by Inayat Khan's resemblance to the legendary oriental 'Masters' and piqued by the possibility that he might be the awaited 'World-Teacher,' but were, in many cases, disappointed to find he did not fit the mold of their expectations."

In letters to Rabia, Inayat recommended she delay legalizing the American branch of the Order. He wrote her from Geneva that he wished to return to America to help her "rebuild," but said he must first work on the affairs of the European branches.

In 1920 the Khan family moved to Wissous, France, and a Parisian Sufi group was formed. Khan visited Britain twice in 1921. One of the marked changes in this period was the creation of the "Church of All." This heterodox organization showed the movement away from a Sufi esoteric tradition into a new religious movement, and the phrase "Universal Worship" was coined. Inayat created a class of officiants called 'Cherags' (from the Persian for

'lamp'), and created certain prescribed rituals for services.

During this period there was more mention and awareness, within the various European Sufi groups, that Inayat Khan should be considered Messenger of the age, seen on a level with the Prophet Muhammad. The remaining strict Muslims within the Order could point to verses in the Qur'an, 40:78, 10:48, 16:36, and 35:24, which seem to allow subsequent Messengers to mankind. Pir Zia states:

"On the basis of this verse [40:78], the 18th century Naqshbandi shaykh Jan-i-Janan wrote: 'When the holy Qur'an has preferred to remain silent about many prophets, it is incumbent on us to adopt a liberal attitude with regard to the prophets of India.'"

Pir Zia also writes: "In an unpublished compilation of personal narratives by 46 original murids titled 'Memories of Murshid', Inayat is variously referred to as the World-Teacher, Christ, Christ-man, Prophet, Messenger, Rabi, and Rasul." Inayat Khan is alleged to have acknowledged these perceptions in private. Any Sufi order, regardless of founder or location, would say that its goal is to

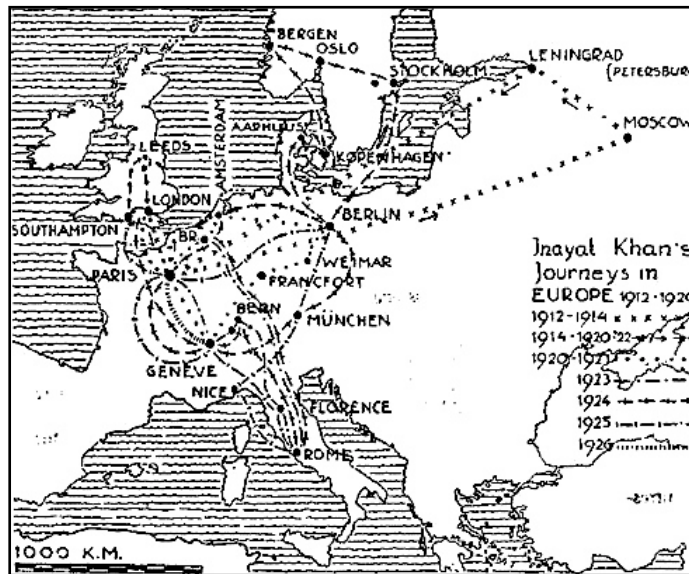
reproduce the heart-states of the Prophet Muhammad in the followers who are capable. Pir Zia continues reportage of the perceptions of Inayat's followers for several pages of Chapter Four. He points out that, since Inayat was a full Murshid, having undergone the complete Sufi training, beginning with 'fana' (annihilation) into his master Madani ('fana fi-shaikh'), who transferred his consciousness to the Prophet Muhammad ('fana fi-Rasul') who in turn handed him to God ('fana fi'llah'), then in a sense Inayat Khan was indeed one with the Prophet. However, this ignores the fact that any Kamil Shaikh (perfected murshid) could claim the same state and status.

Inayat Khan returned to America in February 1923 intending a three month long tour. He remained in San Francisco for seven weeks, giving public lectures and private classes for murids. These lectures were edited and later published under the title "Gita Dhyana".

Later that year Inayat traveled to Geneva, and began a revision of the Sufi charters. He merged the Sufi Order

into the Sufi Movement, which included the Brotherhood and the Universal Worship. He handed the creation of the new 'constitution' to Enrique Zanetti, a Harvard-trained lawyer. Inayat continued to Germany and Holland, where brother Maheboob Khan lived with his new bride, and on to Belgium. He continued travel through 1924, offering lectures across France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, and England. New centers sprouted in his wake. His lectures were transcribed and transmitted to Geneva headquarters.

A new center was created in Suresnes, France. Several leaders and murids had homes or second homes in Suresnes. Earlier Inayat wrote Rabia that the little town "will become a Sufi colony"... and it did.



In Europe and England, as Pir Zia describes, Inayat created new levels of certification within the Esoteric School, giving four Circles of Initiation, each with three internal grades, and so on. He contrasts this with the comparatively simple structure of Orders in the East: the 'bayat', initiation of a murid, and 'khalifat', the movement to 'junior murshid' status. Inayat had clearly moved the European organizations far away from the original Chishti model. These changes were notably

absent in the groups led by Murshida Martin.

What followed could have been foreseen and prevented. As the number of centers in multiple countries grew, there was an added bureaucratic level of administrators, all the way to the highest level within the Sufi Movement. Inayat Khan found himself simultaneously the Pir-o-Murshid of the Esoteric School, functioning as an Eastern-style spiritual master, endowed with the authority of 'insan al-kamil' (perfect man), and also as the administrative head, the 'Representative General' of the international Sufi Movement. In late 1925 at an annual council meeting at Geneva Headquarters, while Khan was traveling, a constitutional proposal was made to abolish the Representative General's vote in the Executive Committee, since that position held both four votes and the power of veto. Politics and voting. As Pir Zia puts it:

"Did the Sufi Movement exist to serve the Pir-o-Murshid's agenda, or did the Pir-o-Murshid exist to serve the Movement's agenda?"

Essentially they were defining the difference between esoteric and exoteric authority. Some within the hierarchy of the Movement felt strongly that as Khan was the Messenger, that all such politics was destructive, since the Murshid was in a state of 'fana fi-illah', he essentially was the voice of God, infallible. Of course this attitude implies total dependence upon that individual. Others believed that Khan was so absorbed in the spiritual that he had neither time nor interest in the temporal, using his frequent absences from meetings as evidence. A response to that was "... a mystic is not dependent on what various people tell him." The result of this particular vote was ten in favor, seven against. When presented to Inayat Khan, he cast his four votes against, and the attempt to limit Khan's constitutional powers failed.

In a subsequent letter to his wife, he wrote, referring to the vote:

"When a disciple begins to judge the teacher or his actions, to criticize his teachings, or try to test his inspiration or power, however cleverly he may do it, he ceases to be a disciple in the right sense of the word. In may not seem very bad to many, but there is a thin thread connecting the pupil with his spiritual guide, and at any moment this can easily break, once broken it can never be mended."

Pir Zia states at this point in the narrative that family lore has it that Inayat wished to return to India, and was only forestalled by the pleading of his family, who feared if he left Europe he would not return. Clearly needing a change of scene, he sailed for New York, intending another tour of America. He wrote to Rabia from New York,

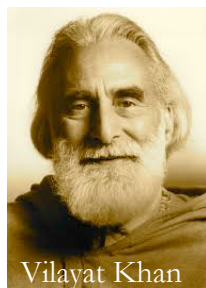
".. After the Geneva council, if not for the cause I would have left the whole affair and gone to the East."

In the book Lord Meher by V.S. "Bhau" Kalchuri we read about Vilayat Khan's visit to Avatar Meher Baba in 1959:

Baba then said (to Vilayat Khan, Inayat's eldest son, then 43), "Since you have come all this distance to see me, I want you to do one very simple thing. Spare five minutes every night at twelve o'clock and meditate on Baba. Concentrate on my face."

Vilayat said, "This would annoy my Murshid."

Baba replied, "If your Murshid



Vilayat Khan

were a Perfect Master, he would never get annoyed. And if your Master were to be annoyed over this, he could never be a Murshid!" (It is clear the Murshid referred to was not Inayat Khan.)

Meher Baba has indicated that Inayat Khan was a genuine fifth-plane saint.

Prior to his departure for New York, Inayat performed an initiation and investiture of his sons Vilayat and Hidayat, age eleven and ten, as Khalifas, lieutenants in the Sufi Order. This would have important future repercussions. This event was echoed many years later when Pir Vilayat appointed his own son Zia as the future head of the Sufi Order.

### America and India - the Last Days of Inayat Khan

Inayat Khan was hampered by ill health throughout the 1926 American tour. By now expert in gaining the attention of newspapers, he met such celebrities as Henry Ford, and gave several standing-room only lectures in the Detroit area. By February 1926 he was in northern California, reunited with Rabia and her groups. He met Nyogen Senzaki, a famous Zen teacher, through Rabia. Senzaki later published an article about their meeting titled 'Mohammedan Zen: Sufism in America.' Samuel Lewis, who claimed to have been initiated in the astral planes by Inayat Khan, was granted six interviews. Lewis later stated that in the second of these, Khan bitterly complained about how few loyal murids he actually could claim; if true, he was still showing disapproval of the recent Council meeting in Geneva.

Inayat returned to Europe, but clearly no healing had taken place between him and the Executive Committee. He was determined to leave for India, accompanied only by a secretary, and boarded ship from Italy on September 28, 1926. Landing in Karachi, he traveled to Lahore and then Delhi. Khan had been away from India for sixteen years. Recounted in Pir Zia's dissertation, Inayat Khan wrote his wife:

"My impression of India is not altogether good; perhaps it is partly owing to my condition [his health] and partly by staying in Europe for so long. I have become more critical. They seem to me neglectful, dreamy..."

"My impression of India is not altogether good..."

Inayat Khan did seek help for his physical ailments, and while in Delhi reunited with Khwaja Hasan Nizami. Nizami

was a prominent Chishti, keeper of the famous Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya, and proprietor of his own Sufi newspaper, in which he published an account of their visit, terming Khan as "our Murshid."

In January 1927, after some travels in northern India, Inayat traveled to Ajmer, Rajasthan, to attend the 'urs' (death anniversary) of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, founder of the Order in India. Pir Zia reports, "Soon after optimistically reporting 'Coming to Ajmer has done my broken spirit good,' he was overtaken by severe influenza." Inayat returned to Delhi in mid-January and went downhill quickly, possibly from pneumonia.

He passed on at his Tilak Lodge residence in Delhi on the morning of February 5th, 1927, at age 44.

### The Succession

A nineteen-page article was printed in the November 2004 issue of Glow International, 'A Journal dedicated to Meher Baba.' The authorship is unclear, although it begins with a page-long letter from Murshida Carol Weyland Conner, of Sufism Reoriented. In the body of the text, we are told that Inayat Khan informed his dear friend, fellow Chishti and spiritual advisor Hasan Nizami ('... the most prominent Sufi leader of India') that he had appointed Rabia full Murshida, a fact affirmed by Nizami when he (re)appointed her full Murshid in Delhi in 1939:



"Seven days before Inayat Khan's death, he (Inayat) told Hasan Nizami that he had named Rabia Martin, the American Murshida, as his successor."

Inayat Khan's attorney, Enrique Zanetti, who had revised the constitution of the Sufi Movement, invited Rabia Martin to a meeting held in Suresnes. Both Zanetti, the Executive Supervisor, and Talwar Dussaq, General Secretary of the Sufi Movement, seemed ready to accept Martin's claim as Khan's successor as the Representative General, seen as an administrative, exoteric position. Pir Zia states:

"Dussaq's reasoning was threefold: 1. Martin was the senior Murshida, 2. Martin had proven administrative ability, and 3. Inayat Khan had praised Martin's devotion to the Message."

Martin's internal map and perceptions proved to be quite different. Her actions and words in her only visit to the

complex political infighting in the Sufi Movement headquarters proved quite maladroit. She misread the entire situation. She lost the support of both Zanetti and Dussaq in one event, the Sacred Readings of The Master. She began by addressing people she barely knew, some of whom had worked for the past sixteen years to rise in the European Sufi Movement, as "my dear murids." She then declined to read the prescribed Sacred Words of the Master, and declared: "I have not crossed the ocean to read to you from a paper, but to give you a solid teaching!"

**Her actions and words in her only visit to the Sufi Movement headquarters proved quite maladroit.**

She lost any chance of acceptance at that point. The International Executive Committee met at Geneva Headquarters in September of 1927. The primary issue on the table was to appoint a Representative General, which was the highest administrative post available, political head of the Order. Inayat's next-younger brother Maheboob Khan was elected unanimously "for an indefinite period of time."

Two years later, in a letter from 1929, Rabia wrote General Secretary Dussaq, challenging the recognition of Maheboob Khan as the *esoteric* Pir-o-Murshid of the entire Order, stating:

"The Pir-o-Murshid in his Esoteric rules says, 'Pir-o-Murshid makes rules, his successor is designated by him.' This you must admit is definite. It is not a matter to be *voted* upon. And the spiritual reason why it cannot be voted upon is that it is a *Mystical* degree, and *it is only the Pir-o-Murshid who can recognize and confirm this Mystical degree of attainment*. This state of Hal, as you must know comes only by the divine favor of Allah ... In 1923 when Holy Murshid came to America after an absence of eleven years, he remained as a guest in my home for more than six weeks. During that blessed and holy time he conferred an Initiation upon me as a preparation for the one he completed when he was with us again in 1926. On March 16, 1926, he conferred another, most holy Initiation, his last, and that Initiation made me his *Esoteric successor*. ... Can you refer to a single Messenger whose Successor was *chosen by vote*? Either we draw our authority from God or from man — it is one or the other." (italics and emphasis hers)

In her indignation, Rabia had utterly forgotten the events following the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

As powerful as that letter was, she never received an invitation to the next (1930) Executive Committee meeting. That summer Samuel Lewis sent at least one letter to the Committee, stating that Inayat Khan had asserted to him in 1926 that Rabia was indeed his successor, and that he, Lewis, was to defend her and prevent her from defending herself. However, she could never resist getting a word in, and Lewis wrote, "... and this led to her downfall."

"... and this led to her downfall."

In 1930, before the meeting, Rabia was requested to provide some 'tangible proof' supporting her claims, and sent them a letter termed by Dussaq as containing 'slanderous allegations'. Further, the Initiation she was given by Inayat Khan in 1926 had also been given to Maheboob Khan. Dussaq also pointed out that the norm for an appointee is to possess a 'written', an 'ijazat nama' or 'khilafat nama', a document mentioning the Order's silsila and the specific abilities and duties of the appointee. Martin offered instead a turban given her by Inayat Khan. Dussaq pointed out that Khan's son Vilayat had been given his father's *personal* turban.



The 1930 Executive Committee was fully attended, except, as usual, for Rabia Martin. Rabia's letter was read, and one of the members, Shahbaz Best, commented her language was 'forcible'. Pir Zia recounts:

"In her defense, Best stated, 'I would, however suggest that we should, as it were, exonerate her, because I understand that *one of her race* employs traditional language, and if we would understand that it is not necessarily personal, but an individual method of expression, we would be less moved by those words.' Though offered in Martin's defense, Best's identification of Martin's shortcomings as *symptomatic of her Jewish identity* evokes the conviction of Martin and Samuel Lewis, apparently never committed to writing but communicated orally that *racism was a significant factor* in the rejection of Martin's claim in Europe." (italics mine)

That 'defense' was faint praise indeed. I honor Pir Zia's honesty on the point of racism and possibly sexism. However, note that the blame does not fall on male Indian

Muslim relatives-of-Inayat, protecting their sources of income, but upon the voting members of this Executive Committee, who were mostly white Europeans. He also says there is anecdotal, not written, evidence, that both Martin and Lewis believed there was anti-semitism involved in the Executive Committee's decision.

Pir Zia reproduces Dussaq's reply to Martin in full:

"This statement seems to me most extraordinary for is it not strange that Pir-o-Murshid kept all the Murshidas, yourself included, and Khalifs and Shaikhs of the Sufi Order ignorant that you were to be his Successor, but made the disclosure of it to Mr. Samuel Lewis, who has no standing in the Sufi Order, for whatever be the value, in your eyes, to be a 'Khalif by spiritual degree'. However let us admit that Mr. Lewis' statement was true and that he did not misinterpret the Master's words, or that he did not imagine it, which is likely—for is it not well known that certain visionaries are subject to strange delusions and hallucinations, and you have declared, as well as Mr. Lewis himself, that he has *visions*—even supposing his statement to be correct, we cannot take it into consideration, for we happen to have in this office written instructions from Our Blessed Master urging us never to act upon anyone's saying, 'Murshid has told me,' but only to act upon what Murshid himself had told us."

This is an extremely interesting letter. Dussaq says Samuel Lewis had 'no standing in the Sufi Order', and proceeds to mock Lewis for his 'visions,' even though Inayat Khan himself had said that Lewis could indeed channel him (Khan) regardless of time or space. The 'visions' comment seems to illustrate the gulf between the arid political environment of Geneva and Martin's geographically isolated Order. She had created, under Inayat Khan's direction, an Indian, traditional, spiritually-oriented group, where there was a direct link between members' rank and their level of illumination. (The reason Murshida Martin did not simply appoint Samuel Lewis as 'khalifa', or lieutenant, or why this was not recognized in Geneva, may not be recoverable.)



Samuel Lewis

The traditional Chishti 'sama' or qawwali singing is designed to invoke 'hal', an ecstatic, visionary state, in the participants. General Secretary Dussaq's dry and biting wit is hardly indicative of an ecstatic experience. However, in his defense, since the 1880s, the popular press had colored and confused genuine spiritual



movements with Spiritualism and Occultism, with their myriad fake mediums and apparitions. Dussaqa may have heard entirely too much about 'visions'. But he did manage to completely discount the perceptions of both Martin and Lewis — Khan's apparent protégé in America, and one of Inayat's hand-picked and trained murids.

The 1930 vote to elect Maheboob Khan as esoteric Head and Pir-o-Murshid of the Sufi Order failed, and the Committee split somewhat acrimoniously, with several European and British members severing all ties to the Sufi Movement. When Rabia Martin received the news in San Francisco, she declared herself the Representative General of the Sufi Movement (the exoteric administrative title she claimed not to want) and announced that she 'no longer recognized the authority of Headquarters.' It seems paradoxical, to simultaneously separate from an organization and announce oneself as its head.

### FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

What could have caused such a series of apparent missteps from someone groomed to be Inayat Khan's successor? It is clear from all accounts that Khan prized Rabia highest of all his trainees on both sides of the Atlantic.

Pir Zia's dissertation goes on for hundreds of pages, many of them describing at length the multiple Centers, the Byzantine political and organizational structures, created in Europe by Inayat Khan over time. 'Cherags,' untold committees and administrative sub-sub positions, all of it held together by Khan's Rasul-like charisma.

For years on end, Murshida Rabia Martin's only connection to the Sufi work was the occasional instructional letter from Inayat Khan, now gone. She was over six thousand miles away in California, in an era where long distance international phone calls were a generation or two away, where she studied Arabic and the Qur'an and trained her own murids in the traditional Chishti manner, in a simple, two-layer organization. She had been busy, with Inayat Khan's emphatic approval, recreating a medieval, spiritual Sufi Order in San Francisco.

Her error in misreading the status-conscious hierarchically-oriented Europeans, and committing personal faux pas, led to being shut out of the succession deliberations almost completely. She only visited Europe once between 1927 and the final break in 1930, and was not present for the infighting in the many subsequent meetings to choose Khan's successor. She was the apparent victim of a political process and structure she simply did not understand and was not a part of.

Rabia never had a chance.

For all the voting, factions, and meetings the Europeans had, it strikes me how ethnocentric they were in the search for Khan's spiritual and temporal successor. Did it occur to no

one in the Sufi Movement, especially the Indian relatives, to journey to Ajmer or Delhi and lay this at the feet of the Shaikh ul Mashaik? (the world leader of the Chishti Order.) The answer lies between the lines in Pir Zia's history. The European Sufis had deified Inayat to the point where they referred to him as 'Rasul', i.e. one with, or on a level with, the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore there was no one in India, in their view, worth turning to. It's possible no one could have measured up. They may also have had the European subconscious and unspoken contempt for (brown-skinned) Colonials from the Subcontinent. So their own psychology limited their search for a temporal and spiritual replacement to within their own ranks. Thus Maheboob, the next younger brother, held the position of Representative General until Inayat's son Vilayat was old enough.

Every sign points to Martin's understanding of her role as Khan's *spiritual* successor. Note her understandable disdain of the European group's process and especially of *voting in a successor*. "Either we draw our authority from God or from man — it is one or the other," she said.

### WHEN FAILURE AND SUCCESS ARE THE SAME

For those who know their Muslim history, she was Hazrat 'Ali in a community which had elected Abu Bakr after the death of the Prophet. The Prophet had declared, "I am the city of wisdom, and 'Ali is the door to it." 'Ali was the vessel carrying spiritual knowledge to the world. Abu Bakr was

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older, an established part of the Muslim community, and became the First Caliph, successor to the Prophet, because he simply *got more votes*. To his credit, Pir Zia acknowledges the similarity of Rabia Martin's situation to the Abu Bakr - 'Ali schism (that is, the Sunni-Shia split) in the early Muslim community. This Sunni - Shia (Shiati 'Ali) means supporter of 'Ali) divide survives to the present day and is the cause of much suffering in the Muslim world.

What Pir Zia appears to have missed, or at least did not discuss, is that all Sufi orders, Sunni and Shia, except for one (Naqshbandi-Haqqani) have 'Ali right behind the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) and the Prophet in their Silsila, the chain of succession. Fourteen hundred years of Sufis have considered Hazrat 'Ali to have something crucial for the spiritual

development of mankind, conveyed in the traditional transmission of knowledge from Murshid to murid, the goal being the illumination of the student. Pir Zia may not have wished to introduce this thought because it inevitably proceeds to the next idea: *if rejected Rabia was that generation's rejected 'Ali, carrying the spiritual charge, where does that leave the various other Sufi Order/Movement branches?* Famed author and Sufi Idries Shah writes about what he terms 'remnant cults', organizations which persist, sometimes for generations, long after the 'baraka', or original spiritual charge, is gone.

On March 29, 1948, Meher Baba dictated a letter via Dr. Ghani Munsiff to Murshida Ivy O. Duce, successor to Rabia Martin as the head of Sufism Reoriented. It included this passage:

"The spiritual worth of Rabia Martin consists in being appointed as Murshida by Hazrat Inayat Khan personally and directly. Hence the effort on the part of Rabia Martin to obtain a written investiture from Hasan Nizami was altogether superfluous and unnecessary."

As a Meher Baba devotee, I am reminded that all this unfolded during His lifetime according to His wish and will. It was no accident. There is no injustice in the Sufi Movement's rejection of Rabia Martin.

On the contrary, it freed her to find Meher Baba.

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### Source Material

Biography of Hazrat Inayat Khan, letters between he and Rabia Martin

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