



A Brief History of the Sufi Healing Activity

There is a need for thoroughgoing research on the subject of the history of the healing activity in the Sufi organizations descended from Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan (1882-1927). In the absence of such real research, I am here going to sketch what little I know about it, but I sincerely hope some interested party will do this properly before long.

When Inayat Khan first gathered a group of students around him, which was in London during the First World War, the subject of healing came up naturally. Even in the Church of England the practice of laying on of hands for healing was being revived, and virtually every movement of alternative spirituality offered some form of spiritual healing. In 1916, Inayat Khan began giving a weekly class on healing (Wednesdays at 16.30), and the transcripts of these classes still constitute a part of the Githa papers (for levels 4-6) on healing.

Inayat Khan's main teachings on healing were given in weekly lectures in the Summer School in Suresnes in 1924. In these lectures, later published as *Health* and incorporated into the *Sufi Message* volume 4 on healing, he explored many aspects of the healing practices in his day. He predicted, for example, that surgery would gradually be replaced by medications. He gave valuable working definitions of health itself (rhythm and balance), and pointed out the shortcomings in prevalent medical practices. He did not, however, anticipate antibiotics (which would have saved his own life, as he died from chronic pneumonia), organ transplants, or the popularity of cosmetic surgery! These lectures are now available, for the first time, as actually given, in the latest volume of the series *The Complete Works of Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan*, just published by Omega Publications in the United States.

Exactly when a formal activity of healing began is not clear. A Welsh mureed, Mrs Gladys I LLOYD (she spelled her last name with two capital LLs) was initiated as Shefayat (from *shafee*, healer), and later became Kefayat (from *kafee*, remedy). When the Sufi Movement was formally inaugurated in Geneva in 1923, there were only two activities besides the Sufi Order (the esoteric school): the Universal Worship (inaugurated in May, 1921) and the Brotherhood activity (started informally around 1917). To this were added the Healing Circle and the Zira'at, some time before 1926, making five branches or activities.

Kefayat LLOYD was in charge of this activity, and collaborated with Inayat Khan in creating a Healing Circle, a group of people who came together with a leader (Conductor) to have a brief prayer circle (it takes about 20 minutes) for those who had requested it. This remains the central activity of the Sufi Healing Order, even though many other activities have been added in the meanwhile.



Inayat Khan himself was well-known as a healer, and there are many stories of those he healed from physical afflictions (such as Sirkar van Stolk, a principal organizer) and mental afflictions (such as Murshida Sherifa Goodenough, his editor). His cousin-brother Muhammad Ali Khan, who eventually became his second successor, had set up already in 1916 an 'Eastern Magnetic Treatment', for which he had been trained in Baroda before they came to the West. He had a great reputation as a healer, and there are many stories of his miracles over the years (he died in 1958). Inayat Khan did not encourage mureeds to undertake individual healing practices, and did not offer any training in these matters. He also made it clear that a true healer does her or his work without remuneration.

There was a long period after Inayat Khan's death in 1927 when many healing circles continued to perform the service, but no new elements were introduced into the Healing Order. In the 1970s Pir Vilayat Inayat-Khan, head of the Sufi Order International, appointed an enthusiastic American, Himayat Inayati, as Worldwide Kefayat, and from that point the healing activities expanded greatly, both in America and in Europe. The Kefayat for Europe was an Englishwoman, Sarida Brown, who for many years edited a beautiful and inspiring journal, *Caduceus*, which reached a much larger audience than just the Sufi Healing Order. Himayat organized many large conferences, and also initiated training courses for Shefayats in the Healing Order.

When Himayat resigned his position to pursue a different focus, Sarida Brown became the Worldwide Kefayat and Devi Tide became the North American Kefayat. Both have worked tirelessly to promote the Sufi Healing work and to take the practitioners to deeper and deeper levels. The Healing Order is in the process of creating a website which will give an overview of its activities worldwide.

Meanwhile, of course, every Sufi organization derived from Inayat Khan's teaching (I think there are nine at present) has its own healing activity. I cannot comment on these as I don't know anything about them – which is one among several reasons that this short account can only be a barebones beginning of the process of making a proper account of this essential activity.

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