Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid
Vilayat Inayat Khan
1916 - 2004

Pir Vilayat held his last retreat at Christmas 2003 in Bad Überkingen/Germany. Despite his age of 87 he was full of energy and spiritual power which filled the hall. He mostly impressed by his directness, his sincerity. He was completely authentic. No shadow to hide, no doubts to suppress. During his long life - 19 June 1916 to 17 June 2004 - he went through pain, rejection and criticism. Nevertheless he stayed open.

He himself says:

"Anyone volunteering to embody the archetype representing people's higher self will have to choose between artfully concealing one's shadow and, when discovered, justifying it hypocritically, or alternatively, exposing oneself to scrutiny and criticism by all. Should one have the honesty and courage to confront one's shortcomings, one will better understand people's problems through seeing oneself in others and others in oneself, thus affording real help to those who also need to transmute their shadow elements."
(Elixir 1/05, p. 35)

And Pir Zia adds about his father:

"He wanted to stimulate what was real and true in each person."
(Heart & Wings Memorial Issue 2004, p. 15)

Shortly after, at the end of January 2004, he had a stroke. And on 17 June 2004 Pir Vilayat died at Fazal Manzil which is the residence of the family Khan in Suresnes/Paris. Pir Zia tells us:

"We all stood and said prayers and held him in our hearts, and his breathing changed and then stopped, his breath left the body and filled the room. In that moment I can very honestly say that I felt not a loss, not impoverishment but just the opposite, enrichment. I felt the release and liberation of his spirit, which had been confined in the agony of that ailing body, the spirit was as it was released and returned to its true element saturating the cosmos, filling the room with a golden hue of peace and joy."
(Heart & Wings p. 3)

Pir Vilayats body was brought to India after his death. His Dargah is near the Dargah of his father Hazrat Inayat Khan in Delhi.

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Vilayat Inayat Khan was born in London on 19 June 1916 as second of four children of the Indian sufimaster Hazrat Inayat Khan and his US-American wife Ora Ray Baker. His father - also named Pir-o-Murshid - had gotten the mission from his spiritual guide Khwaja Abu Hashim Madani to spread the Sufi message into the West. At the age of 28, in
September 1910, he sailed to the USA together with his brothers Maheboob Khan and Musheraff Khan and his cousin Ali Khan. There he met with Pir Vilayat's mother. Two years later he went to Europe. Noor, Vilayat's elder sister, was born in Russia in 1914, his brother Hidayat is one year and his second sister Khair three years younger than Vilayat.

The family is proud of her descent from the Moghul Emperor of Southern India Tipo Sultan, also named 'The Tiger of Mysore' (1749-1799). Jean Overton Fuller, who wrote a very carefully investigated biography of Noor-un-nisa, tells us about Hazrat Inayat Khan and his children:

"He told them whilst very young of their descent from 'The Tiger of Mysore', though he said they should not speak of this outside the family. "You are royal", he said, "and have that in your veins which nothing in the world can take away. You need not be afraid to hold up your heads in any court in the world." Though he stressed very much, after the Oriental manner, the spiritual responsibilities which nobility conferred."


Pir Vilayat tells us that also his mother Ora Ray Baker was not an ordinary woman but of upper class descent:

"She was a far-away cousin from Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, the founress of the Christian Science, and her grandfather Baker was judge at the Supreme Court."

Sifat p. 34 (transl. into English by I.D.)

Maybe this class-consciousness is influenced by the Indian caste system. Maybe it is also a sort of selfprotection to keep up one's spirits far away from the homeland, during a life full of poverty and financial dependence on rich, aristocratic mureeds. Murshid tells us in his autobiography (Biography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, East-West Publications, London and The Hague 1979, p. 185), that poverty proved to be his "bitterest enemy" and several times brought him into a position which very much hurt his pride. But ultimately it was always inner attitude and selfrespect which counted most for Murshid. Pir Vilayat tells us about his childhood:

"I remember my schooltime in Suresnes. I did not speek any French. The children who never had seen a boy with such brown skin, who also was very dreamy, attacked me and thrashed me, and I went back home full of tears. Murshid told me: "Show them that you are stronger than they. It is your selfrespect which makes you strong. Grab the most aggressive boy and keep him on the floor until he gives in." I followed his advice, and after that they lifted me up and carried me round in triumph. From this day I was the most popular boy in the class."

Sifat, p. 34f (transl. I.D.)

Pir Vilayat always had a kind of reserved nobleness. At the same time he showed great humbleness. Pir Zia tells us about him:

"He lived like an ascetic even when he was surrounded by luxury. And toward the end of his life he had hoped to make a final pilgrimage to India, and he even prepared a little collection of items that included a walking stick, a beggar's bowl, and a little assortment of cooking dishes, little copper tins. That was all he felt that he needed, just some of those old unstitched pieces of cloth that he wore - what my brother called a sadhu kit. He was most at home in nature, especially in high places in nature. The Alps camps are the legacy of
Pir Vilayat always protested when his mureeds tried to set him on a pedestal. It happened in the Alps Camp in Switzerland that his mureeds bowed before him when he arrived. He immediately turned around and bowed in the same direction like his mureeds to honour God together with them.

"Pir Vilayat rejected the role of guru. He would not become a substitute for the inner guidance of each mureed but rather always pointed students back to the source of guidance within themselves. (...) He preferred ultimately to be a friend, and never claimed perfection."

Pir Zia, Hearts & Wings p. 13f.

Pir Vilayat's mother was a remarkable woman. She seemed to know exactly what she wanted. "From a child Ora showed great strength of will", says Murshid in his Biography (p. 183). When her family, in particular her halfbrother Dr. Bernard, neglected a marriage between her and Hazrat Inayat Khan and even hid her beloved's letters from her, she managed to find out his address with help of Inayat's family in India, packed her personal things and followed her beloved to England where she married him on 20 March 1913.

On the other hand it is told that Ora Ray or "Amina Begum", how she was named from now on, was very shy, tender and nearly helpless. Fuller tells us that she let the Russian nurse of tiny Noor-un-nisa her way when she started to bind the feet of the baby in the same way as it was custom in China in former days. This was the reason that Vilayat's sister Noor had problems with her feet during her whole life. And when Amina Begum 1927 was told that her husband was dead she had a breakdown from which she never recovered fully.

Pir Vilayat remembers:

"She was completely shattered, inconsolable and without disposing capacity because of her despair. She suffered from heartinsufficiency and actually lay twelve years in bed until she was forced to stand up when the Second World War broke out. Noor who was then twelve years old became our little mother and kept house. She was marvelous! I tried to be the great brother, but I was only ten."

Sifat p. 37 (transl. I.D.)

Murshid had a dominant part in the life of his children. Pir Vilayat remembers how his father carried him in his arms when he was a baby and sang him into sleep. And how he sat on his lap and pulled his beard. At the same time Murshid was a kind of father for all children who played in the garden of Fazal Manzil during the summer school. According to Pir Vilayat he used to tell the children stories from the life of the prophets of all religions. And he made court hearings together with them where he taught them "to confess instead of betray and blame others. It is interesting that we had to decide our own punishment when we were condemned to be guilty" (Sifat, p.36; transl. I.D.).

Noor had the nickname Babuli which means "Papa's Darling", and her sister Khair was
called Mamuli, "Mama's Darling". Fuller shows in her book a handwriting of Murshid where he gives his children various titles: According to this Noor was called Pir-zadi, Vilayat Pir-zade, Hidayat Murshid-zade and Khair Murshid-zadi. What did Murshid mean with these titles? Were Noor and Vilayat designated as potential successors for the role of the Pir or Sheykh? Or was it a means of education which should animate the children to behave like the son or the daughter of a Pir, as Hidayat tells us? (Hidayat Inayat Khan: Es war einmal. Erinnerungen aus frühen Tagen an meine geliebten Eltern. Verlag Heilbronn, 1998, p. 9)?

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Though there is no tradition of automatic succession from father to son in Indian Sufism, Murshid decided to designate his eldest son to be his successor already short after his birth. Pir Vilayat:

"When I was born, in London in 1916, Hazrat Inayat Khan told my mother "My successor is born", and dictated to Miss Williams, then Secretary General of the Sufi Order, stating that in case of his death, Vilayat will be my successor, and until he is of age, Maheboob Khan (his younger brother, my uncle) would take charge. Now that document disappeared. But there's a testimonial by Miss Williams to say that's what happened. In the years that lapsed, Hazrat Inayat Khan occasionally intimated to his mureeds, or made them understand, that he ment me, his eldest son, to be his successor."

*Heart & Wings* p. 24

This designation ended up in a lot of struggles. But some of these later rivalries already began to show in Vilayat's childhood. Pir Vilayat tells:

"One day he (=Murshid) called me to tell me that he wanted to give me a medal. My mother beckoned me with tears in her eyes and said: "Ask Abba why he does not give one to Hidayat too. Because he is as good as you in school." When I asked him he answered: "No, this one is for you."

*Sifat*, p. 36 (transl. I.D.)

Did Amina Begum fear that Hidayat could go short? Or was her intention to keep Vilayat grounded?

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I read Hidayat's remembrance of his childhood: "Once upon a time ..."

In this book there is a photo on page 26 (German edition) which seems to be a symbol for the whole book. On this photo one can see Murshid and - obviously subsequently added - tiny Hidayat. The two photos are selected very carefully. Both faces show the same perspective, the eyes look in the same direction. As if this should be a document to prove that Hidayat is a worthy son of his famous father.

This text gives no answers to the question about the relationship between Hidayat and his brother and sisters because he barely mentions them. Exceptions are only some photo descriptions, faksimiles by Murshid and Ora Ray's poems.

Hidayat's description makes the reader feel uneasy - the big father who stands unattainable on his pedestal, the great moral demands with which Hidayat seems to be confronted.
But not only Hidayat, also Noor and Vilayat seem to have had some difficulties to emancipate from their father. Fuller describes in her biography how Noor tried to avoid every tiny hint to the spiritual background of her father for some time. But she adds that it was much more difficult for Noor (and presumably Vilayat) to keep distance from the expectations that Murshid's mureeds had about the children of Hazrat Inayat Khan.

There are many references that the relationship between Noor and Vilayat was very close. Of course it was Noor who carried the greatest part of the responsibility for the family after her father's death. But Fuller shows that she was supported very carefully by Vilayat. Together they decided to go to England during the first world war and to participate in the resistance against the Naziregime. Together they cared for their mother in England, together they saved all their money to enable their sister Khair to pursue a course of medical studies in Edinburgh (Hidayat stayed with his wife and his children in the south of France during the war). And if Noor uttered a wish, Vilayat would have done all he could to fulfill it, even if he had to make debt (Fuller, p. 102 f.)

Noor became radio operator and returned undercover as "Madeleine" to Paris where she played a leading part in the French resistance. It was Noor who made it possible that the contact between the French resistance and the headquarter in England did not become interrupted even at a time when most of Noor's colleagues already were caught by the Germans. But in the end she was betrayed by the sister of one of her companions, and the Nazis tortured and murdered her in the concentration camp in Dachau.

But this Vilayat did not come to know before the war ended. He was trained as a pilot at the Royal Airforce in the meantime. And he was very fond of flying:

"My joy was making a half loop, then turning off the engine and drifting in the wind amongst the clouds upside down, hanging on my straps in an open cockpit. Here I was at home, set free in the vastness. My dearest wish would have been to live up there permanently. I would exult in the many splendoured array of colors in the clouds, and their evanescent formations, and I would turn my plane into the sun, drinking in its sheer effulgence as I glided upon thin air."

*Pir Vilayat, Elixir 1/05, p. 31*

To fly was very special to him. When he was a child he dreamt to fly like Nils Holgerson on the back of a wild goose in Selma Lagerlöf's story. And he always had a very close relationship to birds. Later he became a falconer and cared very much for his eagles. So I presume it must have been quite disappointing for him when he had to finish his education as pilot after a few month because a test showed that his eyes were not good enough for a fighter pilot (Fuller p. 99). After this he decided to go to the Navy, became officer on a minesweeper and had to clear the water before the landing of the Allies in the Normandy.

It was a great shock when he came to know the cruel death of his sister. In his book "Awakening" he describes how Noor had to suffer. But her last words were: "Vive la liberté!"

And then Pir Vilayat reports from a conversation he had with a french woman who had worked together with Noor in the resistance:
"She told me that she was tortured so much that she could not see any longer, and the supposed dead body was casted into a cell. But even then, she told me, she kept smiling. Why? Because, as she told me, "it was fun for the Nazis to hear us crying; so we decided not to cry. But when the pain became unbearable, the spirit left the unconscious body. From a higher perspective we were able to ignore our suppressors and realized that they could torture our body but that they had no power over our soul."

Awakening, p. 213 (German edition; transl. into English I.D.)

In 1997 Pir Vilayat conducted together with his mureeds a performance of the B minor mass of Johann Sebastian Bach in Dachau to commemorate Noor and the other Nazi-victims.

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But let's turn back to the year 1947. One blow of fate followed the next. First the unexpected death of his father in 1927 during his Indian journey, 1944 the death of his beloved sister in Dachau. And in 1947 the death of his fiancé who was catapulted on the road when the back wheel of Vilayat's motorcycle blocked.

He writes about this time:

"The suffering was too great. I could not see any longer into peoples's faces, especially when I was acquainted with them. This accident took place when my dear uncle Sheikh-ul-Masheik Maheboob Khan wanted to incorporate me more into the work of the Sufi Movement to prepare me for my future duty. With a broken heart I had to refrain from this."

Sifat, p. 41

Vilayat became officer at the British Navy in India. And he claims to have healed himself through hearing the B minor mass of Bach every evening.

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Pir Vilayat would be pleased to hear that during the "Year of Mozart 2006" an international congress in Baden/Austria explored the impact of music on healing and learning processes. He was always very interested in the reciprocal fecundation of science and spirituality. In his youth he had studied philosophy, psychology and physics. He wrote his thesis about psychological factors in the neurological timereaction. Later he established contacts to leading scientists like David Bohm, Frithof Capra, Itzak Bentoff and others.

He had a special relationship to music. This was not surprising because his father was a great musician who gave up his musical career in India to follow the mission his Murshid told him. All four children of Murshid played instruments. Vilayat studied cello at Maurice Eisenberg, and he learned to compose from Nadia Boulanger at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, which was then one of the leading music schools. And his mother encouraged him, happy to prevent him from a fate like his father's.

This hope of Amina Begum turned out to be false. But Pir Vilayat's special insight in the essence of music became very important in his teaching. Songs and instrumental performances were important parts of his retreats and his universal worships. But besides this Pir Vilayat had the rare gift to sense exactly which spiritual plane corresponded to a certain piece of music.
The idea of an analogy of the various spiritual planes with certain pieces of music also appears in the Kabbala (Heinrich Elijah Benedikt, Die Kabbala als jüdisch-christlicher Einweihungsweg, Freiburg im Breisgau 1985, Bd.1, S. 292 ff.)

It was not surprising that Amina Begum wanted to prevent her son from a fate like his father's, because she seems to have experienced the mureeds not always from their best side. Pir Vilayat says:

"My remembrance on my mother arouses deep feelings within me. She was so beautiful, so tender, full of self-sacrifice - a wonderful personality. When I look back I see clearly scenes before my eyes, where mureeds pushed her aside to get near Murshid. And because she had a tender and reserved temper she withdrew with a wounded heart."
_Sifat_, p. 33

Murshid seems to have had sometimes difficulties with his mureeds too. Short before his departure to India he told Pir Vilayat:

"If I only had told them my teachings it would have been so simple. The difficulty lay within the organisation - the egos I had to deal with."
_Sifat_, p. 36

Rather depressing was another incident short before his departure in autumn 1926. There are some hints that Murshid himself and his closest family members had a presentiment that he would never return from this journey. In fact he died in India on 5 February 1927 because of pneumonia.

Before his departure, on 13 September 1926, he laid the foundation-stone for the universel - the temple which became the symbol for the interreligious universal service to God he had created in an instant of divine inspiration. To make this ceremony especially festive his mureeds drew with chalk a circle on the ground and marked a point in the middle where Murshid should stand. They did not know that in many mystic and religious traditions the circle is the symbol for endlessness. And the one who stands within this circle is enclosed in this endlessness which means that he passes into the hereafter.

I is told that Murshid first hesitated but then followed their wish and went into this circle.

At the beginning it seemed to be quite clear to mureeds and family members that Pir Vilayat was designated to follow his father as Pir-o-Murshid. But this changed. Maybe this happened because Pir Vilayat waited to take upon this role until he really felt ready for this duty.

Pir Vilayat tells us that he started with civil occupations after all the suffering during and after the war. Certainly he helped his uncle Maheboob Khan at his work in the Center of the Sufi Movement in London. But besides he worked as Conference Officer at the embassy of Pakistan, became the personal assistant of Pakistan's delegate for the department of the United Nations in Paris 1948, and after this he was private secretary of Ghulam Mohammed, the prime minister of Pakistan, during his visite to Europe because of
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the Sterling talks. He also jobbed as a journalist - as west-european correspondent for the newspaper 'Dawn' in Karachi where he reported about the cruelties which took place during the North African wars of independence.

These jobs also were necessary to earn money, because the family was rather poor, despite the donations of some mureeds. Vilayats mother was seriously ill at this time and died in 1949 because of ileus.

During these years - from 1947 to 1957 - Vilayat also undertook several journeys to India to the Rishis in the Himalaya and to other holy places to prepare himself for his duty as Pir. He meditated near the Bodhi-tree in Bodh Gaya, undertook a retreat in the monastery of Monserrat, visited the mountain Athos, meditated on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, held retreats with the Sufis in Ajmer (where Khwaja Moin ud-Din Chishti, the most famous saint of the Sufi Order of the Chishtiyya in India, lived, meditated and died). And he tried to contact the son of his father's Murshid in Hyderabad/India. This meeting was not possible because this son died in the meantime. But there was the grandson of the grand murshid of Hazrat Inayat Khan - the son of Kalimi Delvini who was the Pir-o-Murshid of Abu Hashim Madani, the spiritual guide of his father. Here he got the final touch for his future position. Pir Vilayat made a retreat under his guidance. And one day his teacher told him to do the Dhikr while going into the consciousness of his father:

"And the extraordinary thing was that he used to call me for prayer five times a day and getting into my father's consciousness, I got into the consciousness of Abu Hashim Madani and getting into the consciousness of Abu Hashim Madani, I got into the consciousness of his father and I was sitting there at the tomb of his father. And so he came in to call me for prayer. And he said, "Vilayat" and I thought, the name is familiar but I... And then he looked at me and he said, "You've seen my father." So he saw the expression of his father, so it shows that it really works."
Heart & Wings, p. 30

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In 1957 Pir Vilayat claimed his role within the Sufi Movement - and it was denied to him. His uncle Maheboob Khan had died in the meantime. Now Ali Khan, a cousin of Murshid, was head of the Sufi Movement. And he did not want to resign. Pir Vilayat about this time:

"I wished that my other uncle (Ali Khan), who was really a cousin of my father, would have given me support that my first uncle gave me and the kind of support that I'm giving my son. But it was the other way around. My second uncle felt that he needed to give me training to be the successor of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan. He exposed me to a most drastic test, which was to give up my claim to be my father's successor. It was probably his way of destroying my ego to the utmost. And I would have respected that if that was the only question. The reason why I couldn't do it was because I would be foregoing my father's wish and so I couldn't go counter to my father's wish and make its application subject to my uncle's decision. I don't want to be judgemental. Looking back, well I was nominated by my father and I was intent on honoring my father's wish; it wasn't mine to give (away). But it is possible one needed more maturity. I had to go through life. So I see sense there. One would tend to be judgemental and say well it was usurping a position. And so I'm a little more mild in my judgment about that whole situation."
Heart & Wings, p. 28 f.

When Pir Vilayat did no longer see a chance for a settlement with his uncle and the other
representatives of the Sufi Movement, he founded a parallel organisation on 17 August 1957 - the Sufi Order International.

The conflict between Sufi Order and Sufi Movement (which in the meantime is led by his brother Hidayat) couldn't be settled during Pir Vilayat's life time - despite his efforts to find a solution for a pieceful coexistence.

In the year 2000 - at the consecration of Pir Vilayat's son Zia as Pir at the Urs of Hazrat Inayat Khan - it seemed as if the quarrelers had buried the hatchet:

"The breakthrough happened when the Shayks drafted the Shajara - i.e. the list of succession in the Silsila of the Chishti Order to which Hazrat Inayat Khan was connected. Murshid Karimbakhsh pointed out that Murshid Ali Khan and his successor did not occur in the list. It came into my mind that in the understanding of the Sufis' principles the Silsila turned out to be like the branches of a tree - this could be illustrated with a tree turned upside down - although the pioneers had wished for it to be one single line. The leaders of the Sufi Movement would accordingly be one branch, the ones of the Sufi Order another branch. Through this approach the root of our dissension has disappeared; the diversity in style and method will remain and can be handled with careness and respect."


However, peace didn't last long. In early summer 2005, ca. one year after Pir Vilayat's death, Hidayat and Karimbaksh Witteveen went to court and claimed the means of Murshida Fazal Mai Egeling Stichting, that she had dedicated to Hazrat Inayat Khan and his successors. In article 3 of this foundation document she explicitly stated:

"Whenever the title "Leader of the Sufi Movement" appears in these articles, this shall refer first to Vilayat Inayat Khan, even if he is not yet or no longer acting in said capacity; next, to the person chosen by Vilayat Inayat Khan as his successor; and then, to those persons appointed in the same manner by their designated predecessors." (Source: an e-mail from Zahir Roehrs, General Secretary of the Sufi Order International, 10 June 2005)

Concerning the relationship between the two brothers it is interesting that Hidayat took up the spiritual leadership of the Sufi Movement only very late, in the year 1988 to be precise, at a time, thus, when Pir Vilayat had established his Sufi Order long since. It is even told that he was helped by Pir Vilayat, who consecrated him a Pir. This rather stresses that Hidayat didn't actively defeat his brother.

What was the relationship like Pir Vilayat had to his nephew Fazal, Hidayat's son? Fazal himself, who died in 1990, claims on the website of the Sufi Way (founded by him in 1985) of having always had a very good relationship with his uncle Vilayat. How does this, though, fit into the story which goes the round in the Sufi Order, that Fazal properly turned his uncle out of Hazrat Inayat Khan's Dargah, in such a rough way that Pir Vilayat had been injured severely?

There is no evidence that Pir Vilayat said something concerning the difficult relationship to his brother. The reason is imho that he spoke openly about all things concerning himself but respected the private sphere of other people. Not even the "Answer to Elizabeth", an e-
mail by Pir Vilayat dated 13 January 2004 and written in Fazal Manzil, which he dispatched to a large number of people amongst them Pir Zia, Hidayat and Karimbakhsh Witteveen - gives a real answer to this ancient conflict. On the question "Why are you not united?" Pir Vilayat only responds:

"I do not know why you think that there is an inharmonious relationship between my brother Hidayat and me.

My relationship with Murshid Karimbakhsh is a deep friendship based upon mutual respect, the Representatives of the Sufi Movement and Sufi Order are getting on fine, cooperating harmoniously in Europe and America. To agree to disagree, we turn the blind eye to belong to different sections of a whole that should never have been split, while recognizing our oneness.

I painfully regret that the Organization created by Hazrat Inayat Khan under the name Sufi-Movement should be split. This split is due to the failure by those who have assumed control the International Headquarters of the Sufi Movement to recognize Hazrat Inayat Khan's nomination of me as his successor despite all the evidence which is logically indisputable."

What follows is an enumeration of proofs which underline this statement - including some original documents of historic interest like the recognition as a Pir by the Indian representatives of the Chishtiyya.

But let's turn back to the foundation of the Sufi Order in 1957. For Pir Vilayat this step was all but easy:

"At first I was only confronted with criticism and opposition. After all these years I can recognize how mature one has to be to hold this position. Some blamed me of imitating my father, others of not doing what my father did. Whatever way I chose I wasn't able to win."  
Pir Vilayat, Sifat p.44 (transl. I.D.)

Pir Vilayat also reports that he tried hard for the proper structure of his organisation. According to his personal character he was more likely to favour the democratic principle:

"But my retreat in India convinced me that my father would have thought it a betrayal on the structure he built up so carefully. (…) Indeed his concept turned out to be right, despite of my efforts towards democracy."

Pir Vilayat, Sifat p. 45 f. (transl. I.D.)

However, this insight didn't prevent him from calling in question hierarchies, initiation steps and even the title Pir again and again. He had both sides to his character - he was connected with tradition and stepped at the same time beyond it only to reestablish - from a viewpoint of newly gained freedom - certain forms which seemed useful to him.

Pir Vilayat didn't only call in question himself but also other people - especially when he realized that somebody used his position in the Sufi Order to dominate others. So the removal of hierarchies was also a sort of ego-training for the persons concerned.

And in the conflicts with the Sufi Movement Pir Vilayat finally came to the conclusion that
they had a good side too. He told his son Pir Zia:

"At times that had been a source of frustration for him, but eventually he came to a sense of peace and in fact appreciation, and I remember him telling me that it was for the best, that it was part of the Divine plan, because if he had not had to establish himself on his own terms he might have just become like an office holder in an institution. He often quoted the words of Goethe, "That which you inherit from your ancestors, if you would claim it, you must earn it." His whole life was a path of fulfillment on which he proved himself to be the one who was to receive the mantle of his father."

Pir Zia, Hearts & Wings, p. 6 f.

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And then one day the question: Are Mary and Taj the same person?

No. Mary was his wife, and Taj was the mother of his two sons.

Written sources about this triangle are scanty. Most of the time it is not or solely indirect mentioned. Pir Vilayat himself writes:

"Short after (various spiritual experiences at holy places in the East and the West) I met with Mary Constance Walls, the grandchild of a priest who was in charge in the St.Pauls Kathedrale, and I married her. She was very ill and had lain in hospital for over one year. She believes that I healed her."

Pir Vilayat (Sifat, p. 43)

and:

"I am blessed with an adult daughter (Maria) and - together with Taj - with two sons (Zia and Mirza), whose character I very much appreciate. To watch them grow up gives me the security that the future lays in good hands."

Pir Vilayat (Sifat, p. 46)

Pir Vilayat lived with his wife Mary in Suresnes. With Taj he met later in the USA. The film "Sunseed" shows the atmosphere of these days. Pir Vilayat as quite young man, thin, without beard, surrounded by young hippies who follow his meditations with ecstatic enthusiasm.

It was a time of experiments, says Pir Zia:

"There was a sudden cultural efflorescence, a 'dropout' culture of those who rejected the establishment and wanted to seek new modes of understanding and new epistemological frameworks. Pir Vilayat was very well placed to offer a path that could serve the needs of the young people who were dissatisfied with the stifling forms of the past. There was something in him that could appreciate the revolutionary spirit in the young people of that time, although sharing absolutely nothing in terms of his cultural background, which came from an old world European background."

(Heart & Wings, p. 8)

Taj was a mureed of Murshid Samuel Lewis, a disciple of Hazrat Inayat Khan, who had founded his own Sufi organisation "Ruhaniat". When Pir Vilayat met him in 1968, Samuel
Lewis very openly offered his mureeds to Pir Vilayat. The two were able to establish a rapport despite of their very different styles. In the words of Pir Zia:

"Murshid Sam subsequently used to describe the Dances of Universal Peace - which he developed near the end of his life - by saying that Pir Vilayat was the father and Murshid Sam was the mother of those dances. Whether Pir Vilayat recognized his child is a question, I suppose."
(Heart & Wings, p. 8)

Troubles arose after the death of Murshid Samuel Lewis in 1971. According to Pir Vilayat the reason was a different viewpoint concerning the use of psychedelic drugs which he decided to reject in his declaration of 1977. But in a personal interview with Taj she pointed out that things were more complex. The drug case made visible the problem that some mureeds of Samuel Lewis did not fully accept Pir Vilayat as their Pir. This turned out to be difficult for both sides because this was the weak point of Pir Vilayat who felt easily threatened in his authority since his experiences with the Sufi Movement. Taj: „He was the most complex personality besides his genius.“

Most of the leaders of Ruhaniat left the Sufi Order in 1977 and took their own way, developing further the dances and their musical skills. Pir Vilayat found new mureeds especially in upper class circles. He tells us about this conflict and the time afterwards:

„From a certain point things seemed to flow. I was invited for seminars in flats of the upper middleclass in California. When the New Age Floerpeople joined us, the bourgeois people stayed away. Years after - alarmed by the information that drug could have a bad influence on the subtler bodies of the mureeds who seeked my spiritual guidance - I issued a drug prohibition which ended up in the exclusion of a great part of the New Age Group. Today these mureeds are back in the civil life, dedicated to the teachings of Murshid."
(Sifat, p. 46)

It took nearly three decades until Sufi Order and Ruhaniat formed a Harmony Committee and disclosed a common statement in July 2006:

Toward the One
United with All

Beloved Ones of God,

The Sufi Order International and the Sufi Ruhaniat International are united in our common dedication to the Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan. The Sufi Message affirms the unity of spirit and the multiplicity of form. History has challenged us in our capacity not merely to proclaim this Message, but to embody it. In our human limitation, we have struggled, and sometimes failed, to properly align our interpersonal and institutional relationships with our ideal of unity in multiplicity. The experience of misalignment has been a source of much pain. The Spirit of Guidance is now calling us to witness the pain of our disunity and to reach out to each other open hearts and open minds. The open letters that follow are offered as sincere gestures of this kind.

Pir Shabda Khan
Pir Zia Inayat-Khan
Pir Zia adds in his own statement that Pir Vilayat himself had rescinded his declaration from 1977 just months before his death and affirmed Murshid Samuel Lewis dedication to the Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan to prepare the reconciliation between the two orders.

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But let's turn back to the Seventies. In 1975 Pir Vilayat founded the Abode of the Message in the US state of New York - in a former shaker village with ancient wood houses and a traditional herb garden, surrounded by a beautiful mixed forest. Here he wanted to live with Taj and his two sons and try to realize his vision of a community where Sufi ideals can become reality in daily life.

But in his innermost being Pir Vilayat was an eremite, and so he built near the abode - amidst the forest and with beautiful view over the landscape - his "pod", a globe-like hut which reminds a little of a space-ship.

Pir Vilayat had his home now on two continents. Every year he held a summer camp in the Swiss Alps and another camp in the USA.

Concerning Taj and Mary it happened one day that Taj married another man - the lawyer Richard Glantz. And during the last months of Pir Vilayat's life she became friend with Mary.

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There exists a document which gives deep insights into the soul relationship that connected Pir Vilayat and Taj: the "Keeping in Touch Nr. 137", the last one of a series of teaching letters which Pir Vilayat used to address to his mureeds.

This Keeping in Touch came into being short before his death when Pir Vilayat was barely able to communicate with other people because of his stroke. It was his wish that Taj would compile this teaching letter together with him, and she tells us in the introduction of this paper:

"I remember that time now with so much tenderness. I feel grateful in those last days, even under such difficult circumstances, to have had the joy of sharing deeply our inner thoughts and experiences as we had for over 35 years. In some way, this Keeping in touch is a testament to our ongoing dialogue: the conversation we started when we first met and which continued until he was not longer able to speak."
Keeping in touch Nr. 137, October 2004

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Like his father Pir Vilayat always was open for the dialogue with other mystic and religious traditions. The Chishti Order had in India already at a very early stage adopted elements of yoga and Buddhism. Hazrat Inayat Khan and Pir Vilayat also integrated a lot of Jewish and Christian elements. Although Sufism is the mystic tradition of Islam it was no requirement for their disciples to join Islam. One of the central rituals in the Sufi Order is the Universal Worship which integrates all religions into the ceremony - in an active, not only tolerating form which is unique as far as I know.
Pir Vilayat also established contacts to many spiritual contemporaries—e.g., Swami Rama, Swami Satchitananda, Reb Schlomo Carlebach, Reb Zalman Schachter, brother David Stendl Rast and David Spangler. From 1965 to 1986 he held every spring interfaith congresses near Paris. He committed on peace, and he led a campaign to liberate political prisoners for Amnesty International. In 1975 he founded the Children's Ashram Fund to finance the Hope Project in Delhi—a project which began as precaution against deficiency disease with a daily cup of milk for children and which developed in the meantime to a model project for care of babies, children, youths and their mothers. Today the Hope Project for which Pir Vilayat always collected money himself with his beggar's bowl also has a health center and a school center. The main goal is that the persons concerned gain self-confidence, are enabled to make a human living themselves and become independent of social transfers.

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To enable people to find their path themselves was also his goal in dealing with mureeds. Pir Zia writes about his father:

"His primary purpose as a teacher was to cultivate each person's own inner guidance and not to tell people what to do, and more and more he committed himself to that approach. He was very, very careful never to give advice to people, but rather to give people the tools and the inner capacity to realize what was right."

Heart & Wings, p. 13

Pir Vilayat always tried to develop himself further. At the beginning he was much more demanding and held f.e. camps in the mountains at icy temperatures and without any comfort. 1980 he was even caught in a snow storm in a cave in the Alps.

His ascetic inclination also finds an expression in the following quote:

"The only way to help people is to help them see that in fact they can meet the stress (of life). Of course, first of all the stress has to be there. I can think of a case in my own personal life; I was climbing in the mountains near Chamonix, very high, and the rocks were falling underneath my grip, becoming pulverized. They would get very brittle and break down while I was holding them, and collapse under my hand or feet. I was with somebody else, and we both realized that we would never be able to go back down the same way we came up. There was a wall of ice there, absolutely vertical, and the only way to come down - we didn't have any ropes - was to kick a hole in the side of the wall and then place and then let go of the foot in the first hole and put a hand in that hole and kick another hole lower down. Now, no way in the world would I have ever believed I could have done that. It gives one a great sense of self-confidence when one realizes that one has capacities in one that one didn't believe in before. There are resourcefulnesses that only break through when the system is stressed beyond a certain point."

Heart & Wings, p. 32

Later this frontier crossing took increasingly place on the spiritual, not on the physical planes.

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Pir Vilayat dealt with the ancient traditions very carefully. He taught his mureeds only
things he himself had explored deeply. A good example is the work with the Wazaif or "God's Names". He didn't use all the Wazaif from the beginning. Mureeds say that he started with few. From time to time he added a new one which he had obviously studied thoroughly. Sometimes he also changed his mind about such a Wazifa. It happened that some of his mureeds didn't notice this change in mind, so that he told them at a leader's meeting that he wanted his mureeds to develop further together with him, not spreading things he had said years ago.

He liked to work with breath and light, and he was especially fond of a practice from yoga tradition named Qasab which connects both aspects and which enables people according to Pir Vilayat to heal the past through the future (a precise description of the Qasab is in his book "That Which Transpires Behind That Which Appears, p. 189 ff. German edition). At Qasab one has to inhale alternately through the left and the right nostril. In between one holds the breath. And this moment makes possible what the Sufis call the "moment of time". Here Pir Vilayat often quoted Hujwiri, a Sufi who settled in India long before the arrival of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti: "The moment of time is a sharp sword which separates the guilt of the past and the longing of the future." According to Pir Vilayat one is able to be free from destination in such a moment. One can decide without being influenced by ancient burden. And then he used to quote the mathematician Leonhard Euler (1707 - 1783): "The pull of the future is stronger than the push of the past."

Very important practices for Pir Vilayat were the Dhikr and Tasawwuri Murshid which means the entrance into the consciousness of a higher developed being - an experience which Pir Vilayat himself had practised so intensely during his education in Hyderabad. In addition to his father he had a special relationship to two Sufi masters: al-Hallaj to whom he already became acquainted with in his youth through his teacher in Paris, Prof. Louis Massignon, who taught comparative religious sciences at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes. The other one was Ibn Arabi, the Shaykh al-Akbar, whom he quoted very often. By the way, these two who lived at different times did not harmonize in all points. But this didn't bother Pir Vilayat. Sufism is no one-way street but a many-sided and paradoxical path which unites seemingly incompatible viewpoints. In his last book "In Search of the Hidden Treasure" Pir Vilayat had the idea to create a virtual conference of Sufis to certain topics, compiled from original quotes (see Bibliography).

But the closest connection he seemed to have to the contemplation of light. In the words of Pir Zia:

"In the last years of his life he really perfected a theme that was a subject of his teaching over the years, one of his great joys, the contemplation of light in its multiple levels. He spoke eventually of seven levels of light. Toward the end he spoke very much of the consciousness of the galaxies."
*Heart & Wings, p. 17*

Short before his death Pir Vilayat told us:

"I will not be able to give seminars anymore, but I am working on seven levels of light, and I will be with our mureeds that way."
*Heart & Wings, p. 1*

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Humour was an important part of Pir Vilayat's personality. So I want to close this profile
with one of his favourite stories:

One day an elephant becomes mad. He threatens people, and nobody is able to get him under control. Only a dervish who lives in this city could bring help. The king sends his people to the dervish, but he does not want to come with them and they have to take him at his shoulders and pull him to the elephant. When arrived in front of the mad animal the dervish only says one word: "Sit!"

And the elephant sits down.

How is this possible? It is quite simple: the dervish is convinced to be God. And the elephant believes him.

Ingrid Dengg, Vienna 2006

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Biography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, East-West Publications 1979


Sources for Sufi Family Tree:

Andrew Rawlinson: A History of Western Sufism

Homepage "The Sufi Way"
www.sufiway.org
Books and writings by Pir Vilayat:

Toward the One, 1974
An introduction into spiritual traditions and practices

A Message in Our Time, 1978
A study about the life and the teachings of his father Hazrat Inayat Khan

The Call of the Dervish, 1981
Sufi-teachings and practises

Introducing Spirituality into Counselling and Psychotherapy, 1982

That Which Transpires Behind That Which Appears, 1994
A book that is based on the revision of the tapes of a three day's retreat in March 1993

Awakening, 1999
Sufi-teachings and practises with an emphasis on the contemplation on masters, saints and prophets

In Search of the Hidden Treasure, 2003
Sufi-teachings in form of a virtual discussion between Sufis from different times and countries, composed with original quotes

Keeping in Touch (1 - 137)
Teaching letters which Pir Vilayat addressed to his mureeds from the seventies until his death (available in the internet at www.centrum-universel)