Year(s) of the Walks and Dances of Universal Peace
(This timeline with notes was produced with the help of Ruhaniat Archivist Tansen O'Donohoe and with the author's access to the Ruhaniat archives at www.murshidsam.org. References and dating evidence from the writings and recordings of Samuel Lewis follow the timeline.—Neil Douglas-Klotz, May 2018.)

Timeline:

1. **Early 1930s: Samuel Lewis meets Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn** in Hollywood, Los Angeles and participates in their Denishawn school, where he dances while St Denis talks about how to pick dances from the *akashic* sphere. Samuel Lewis begins to call Ruth St Denis his “fairy godmother.”

2. **Late 1930s: Samuel Lewis writes “Spiritual Dancing,”** as an informal commentary on Hazrat Inayat Khan’s “Art: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.” The book also references his time at the Denishawn School and includes ideas of Ruth St Denis.

3. **March 1962:** Samuel Lewis visits the tomb of Selim Chishti in Fathepur Sikri, India and receives a **vision of the “Dance of Universal Peace.”** See excerpt of letter below. He reports this two years later to Ruth St Denis, who says that she and Ted Shawn received the same vision while they were there.

4. **September 1963: First Walks** shown to Paul Reps. Murshid S.A.M. begins to instruct his god-daughter and first Khalifa Saadi Khawar Khan in them via correspondence, in preparation for S.A.M’s return to Pakistan and his teaching them to children there.

5. **May 1964:** Murshid S.A.M. meets with Ruth St Denis for an hour and presents his vision of “the Dance of Universal Peace.”

6. **Spring 1967:** Walks classes begin on Saturday for the few early mureeds, including Mansur Johnson, Moineddin Jablonski and Fatima Jablonski.

7. **March 1968:** First small Sufi dance class for mureeds. (See transcribed recording from March 13, 1968 and subsequent letter and diary entries from May 1968 about classes in “Dance of Universal Peace.”)

8. **June 24, 1968:** First public Dervish Dances presented.

9. **July 1970:** Saturday night advanced Dance class continues, along with public Dance classes Sunday afternoon and Monday night (combined with Sufi teachings).

St Denis and Shaw founded the Denishawn school in Los Angeles in 1915 following on from their long career touring worldwide and St Denis’ massive popularity. She was around 50 at the time of her meeting with Samuel Lewis, he was around 44. Samuel Lewis references her in his book “Spiritual Dancing” in chapter 12, “Technique,”p. 57 (pdf version):

“In and around Hollywood there is at least one teacher whose methods are based upon cardiac mechanics and heart-concentration. Its pupils learn, more or less consciously, to invoke psychic forces. They imbibe philosophy from the dance itself. Their spiritual faculties unfold without anything being said of them. At the same time, they emphasize interpretative rather than program dancing. To them, the right interpretive dance offers full scope to the will of the performer and gives her every opportunity for self expression.”

St Denis was the only teacher in Los Angeles teaching spiritual dancing, or in fact, modern dance, as she and Shawn virtually invented the field. Their students at Denishawn included the (later) famous modern dance choreographers Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman.

In “Spiritual Dancing,” Samuel Lewis also mentions Ted Shawn’s male dance troupe, also an innovation. From “Spiritual Dancing, chapter ten, “Sex and the Dance,” p. 49:

“Ted Shawn has propagated the philosophy of the male dancer, though there is not necessarily a male dancer any more than a male eater or a male breather. Something in us which is more than the body dances; the body is but the instrument. But we can say there are male dancers and female dancers, and there are definite Yang movements and Yin movements.”

Shawn founded his male dance troupe in 1933 after the ending of his marriage with St. Denis and the end of the Denishawn School (1932). Shawn was gay, but in those times, it would have been dangerous to have this known. Ruth St Denis did not move to Long Island to teach at Adelphi College until 1938, so she was still in Hollywood through the time that S.A.M. references in “Spiritual Dancing.”
2. Late 1930s: Spiritual Dancing written book by Samuel Lewis.

Various other internal references allow us to reasonably date this manuscript to the late 1930s. The German dancer Mary Wigman and her troupe (referenced in chapter four, p. 21) toured the USA in 1930. From SAM’s comments, he must have seen her dance. Chapter 13 (p.22) references William Butler Yeats’ book A Vision published in 1937. The famous reference to the ‘goose-step’ in chapter four, see below) may or may not be definitive, as the term was used before Hitler (who came to power in 1933). However, the whole tenor of the introduction, plus the ironic reference to “Pure Aryan Science” in chapter 12, p. 56 point to the period following the Great Depression and before the USA entered WWII in 1941.

“The goose-step involves a maximum of Yang to practically the complete exclusion of Yin; metaphysically the goose-step and war are one. The goose-step is a war march, a much or more than the savage dance is a war dance. It makes use of force without stint or qualification. It involves destructive psychic as well as physical forces. To abolish war we must abolish war-like movements.” (Spiritual Dancing, chapter four, “The Metaphysics of the Dance,” p. 20.

In the archives of Samuel Lewis, we also found Ruth St. Denis’ previously unpublished book The Divine Dance, first drafted in 1934, and finally published in its entirety in Wisdom Comes Dancing, 1997, edited by Kamae A Miller. Two comparative passages from RSD’s writing and that of Samuel Lewis in “Spiritual Dancing” follow below.

From “The Divine Dance”:

“We are now the ‘children of God,’ and in the exact measure of our understanding of this spiritual fact will our interpretation of the human body and all its movements assume a different picture to our minds and deeper assurance to our hearts. We shall see that we are looking at the total person! We are looking at a child of God; a ray of the Divine Light; an idea of the One Mind! (p. 30, Wisdom Comes Dancing).

“The dance of the future will no longer be concerned with meaningless dexterities of the body but will move in harmony with the compassionate and joyous rhythms of love, and will obey in strength and balance the vital laws of truth. Here upon the eternal lotus pattern of love and truth the Divine Dance treads the measures of eternity in praise!” (p. 55, Wisdom Comes Dancing).

From lectures of Ruth St. Denis, March 21, 1936:
“The use of the dance with its infinite capacities for form, rhythm and beauty would be a test of a new viewpoint of civilization because it would withdraw the mind and energies to a considerable degree from the creation of a mechanical, artificial world. This artificial world now acts as substitute for the development and realization of our powers, as the automobile has deprived us of the joys of walking.” (Wisdom Comes Dancing, p. 88).

From “Spiritual Dancing,” p. 63 (pdf version)

“Indeed, we look for a universal spiritual-aesthetic revival. The cultivation of ecstasy and attainment of superconsciousness are steps on the way. We are here to complete our humanity, not to avoid it. Therefore, we must hold before ourselves the idea of the holiness of man and the sacredness of the body. Institutions, themes, forms and ideas are inferior to man, for man was created by God, and these things made by man. As man grows in understanding, in consideration and in compassion, spiritual art will unfold itself accordingly. Man's heart-awakening must come first.

“A warning note should be expressed here; if the dance or any art be cultivated for psychic or magical purposes, the world will not evolve, it will retrogress. On the other hand, if there is the hoped-for spiritual awakening, then all the arts will reach a higher status. Perhaps then the magic, the psychic powers, the unknown forces and faculties will appear as if quite natural. With the coming of the Kingdom of God in the human heart many marvels will be added.” (p. 63).

*Samuel Lewis mentions Ruth St. Denis more than 120 times in his letters and diaries as his main inspiration for his work in spiritual dancing and the Dance(s) of Universal Peace.


“Ah Yaint, A Saint” went to Fathepur Sikri. Rushed to the tomb of Saint Selim Chisti and did the usual bowing and everything including baksheesh [Hindi term denoting a cross between a "tip" and an "alm' ed.J. Then I had the guide take me to the local saint. No Americans call on local saints, but Ah Yaint, A Saint did. We greeted and embraced and I gained in holiness--boy! When we returned to the shrine, my friends the Sufi qawwalis came and sang, and I danced and danced-real dervish stuff. A crowd gathered, and when I got tired, I sang and the qawwalis answered. Then the leader got up and asked the crowd for baksheesh to watch the American saint!” (March 21, 1962 to Leonora Ponti)

“When I told Ruth St. Denis that I danced ‘The Dance of Universal Peace’ at Fathepur Sikri she said that Ted Shaun had done the same thirty years previously. The ‘Dance of Universal Peace’ is being withheld until the signal
comes from Sri Surendra Ghose, and it is a dance based on the actual rituals of living religions, not about them, but of them.” (July 29, 1966 to Haridas Chauduri).

“Three copies of Miss Ruth have been purchased, one each for my two respective homes, and one for the American Society for Eastern Arts with its headquarters in this city. I was born in this city years ago a little after Isadora Duncan and Harold Lamb, each of whom has made a mark while I am unknown. In my last conversation with Miss Ruth I said, ‘I have started the Dance of Universal Peace at Fathepur Sikri in 1962.’ She said, ‘Ted Shawn and I did the same thing in the same place 30 years previously.’ I think we understood each other perfectly. No physical resemblance of any kind; I am short and solid, and yet she treated me, especially in her later years, as if I were her flesh and blood son.

“In a conversation some years back I said, ‘Holy mother, I am going to revolutionise the world.’ ‘Now are you going to do this,’ she inquired. ‘By teaching little children how to walk.’ She rose majestically to her full height, pounding on the table with her fist, ‘You have it; you have it; you have it.’

“I am now teaching young adults how to walk. I am now having rather small classes, it is true, on spiritual, esoteric, and mystical dances, all of which can be explained, no nonsense. All my life was determined, perhaps predetermined, by the joint tour of Miss Ruth and the Sufi Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan in 1911 (I believe). I have learned from each and both how to draw inspirations from the universe, though the only thing of mine published, and that by friends, has been ‘The Rejected Avatar.’ (January 6, 1970 to Walter Terry, author of the book Miss Ruth: The More Living Life, published in 1969 by Dodd Mead, New York).


“My brother Saladin was here and the first steps were taken to show somebody the spirituality of how to walk, how to breathe and how to use the names (or attributes) of Allah. This is really the gist of tasawwuf, with or without books, and lectures and sermons.”(September 6, 1963 to Saadia Khawar Khan).

“Now your Murshid has a whole compendium of tasawwuf inside, as well as the writings, to show even little children how to walk with the Zikr and Kalama from earliest childhood. Only this must be illustrated. And when it is taught and done, there will be no boundary to either Islam or tasawwuf, or anything and even a child will have direct wisdom from his own capacity.” (November 3, 1963 to Shemsuddin Ahmed).
“Now I have learned the Walks, and there are the Walks under karma, and there are the walks under salvation. These two stand distinct. The Walks under karma can be analyzed and learned and mastered, or they can master us. The Walks under salvation can be learned and mastered but not analyzed. When you were in love, could you analyze the walks you took to your beloved, or the walks your child took to you?

“But there are these Walks, and they will be taught in the Orient and to a few here. And for these Walks either there must be an understanding of the breath or the Breath will bring the understanding of the Walks.” (January 14, 1964 letter to "Dear Heart").

“Such is the nature of the spiritual life and love that I am either doing or accomplishing everything Ruth St. Denis wanted, even with my own body. The training of the last year has been such that I can get down on my knees and weed or transplant without the slightest ache or pain or gross and do this for some hours—as Paul and Sharab may attest. But this is not even the first step. **And while the people in this country ignore the wisdom-of-the-body, it will be possible, upon my return to Asia, to teach all kinds of people simple postures, walks and exercises which have both a spiritual and physiological basis.** [Emphasis added.] And I have to visit Ruth S. D. when I reach Hollywood again, whether on my return or otherwise.

“An apothecary is not necessarily a physician or sage and this one make no such claims. Put there must be some wisdom in applying the esoteric knowledge of the great religions or otherwise, and it is not necessary to have any faculty of extreme diagnostic ability to propose types of walks which can clear up many ailments. (June 16, 1964 letter).

“Now as for your Aunt, also the last two for morning prayer. And for her concentration on the Holy Prophet, and this walk after feels some success or assurance: 101 steps in your side courtyard with concentration on ‘Allahuma sall ala Muhammad wa 'ala ali Muhammad kama sallaita ala Ibrahima.’

For you 101 steps in the morning only ‘Audhu billahi minash shatianir-rajim.’ Your Aunt's walk is with concentration on the Holy Prophet and yours is for protection and purifications. Also repeat this when you visit the Dargah Mian Mir.

“Now as for walking. Till this time I have walked as devotee, to feel the presence or the Sifat of Murshids and Saints and Allah Himself (Akhlak Allah) and now your Murshid must walk as a Murshid to attune to and help the mureeds in so far as Allah permits and blesses. This has never been tried but now His Blessed Majesty of Mecca Shereef [Prophet Muhammad] gives this as instruction, and it
shall be tried either after this letter is completed, or if it be long, then during the writing.’ (June 24, 1966 to Saadia Khawar Khan).

5. April/May 1964 Meeting with Ruth St. Denis

“About the beginning of May, I was permitted to see my Fairy Godmother, Miss Ruth St. Denis. It was she who originally brought Pir-O-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan to this country, and she remembers him very well. I can always go into her home or studio in Hollywood whether she is dressed or not—in other words more like she was a real mother; but heretofore when she travelled her press agents and secretaries kept me away. It was always ironic, but her present secretary was willing for me to see her. It did not mean any demand—and it did not. (June 16, 1964 letter).

“Then Saturday I had one hour with my 'fairy god-mother' Ruth St. Denis. It was she who hosted Pir-O-Murshid on his first trip to the United states and she still looks to him with grand admiration. Without contacting her I have done exactly what she wants—words and communications are not necessary between spiritual persons. Indeed I have worked out a complete system of education beginning with early childhood based on 'Alif', a story which is found in some of Pir-O-Murshid's early records.” (April 21, 1964 letter to Sharab).


“This gadfly jogs and listens to God-Allah, and the young believe and they ask how they can learn. The first thing was to teach them how to walk. Sam said to Ruth St. Denis: 'Mother, I am going to revolutionize the world.' ‘How are you going to do it?’ ‘I am going to teach children how to walk.’ And while the old ladies snicker, one taught them how to walk and to breathe and pretty soon miracles began to happen.” (May 25, 1967 to Shamcher Beorse).

“Actually I only have room from twenty here, and if the groups get large will break them up. Saturday morning is based on walking. We have the ‘walking Yoga’ and it has been effective not only in awakening the inner consciousness but in helping the devotees to walk a long time without fatigue and also to climb hills. The subject of tassawur was not introduced until the sixth year, I believe. But I am unable to follow the complete Gatha-Githa method, because I do not have all the papers and will not ask anymore. People cannot walk the Sufi path and ignore God, and that is exactly what is going on.” (September 1, 1967 to Shamcher Beorse).
Related to these early classes, see also the references toward the beginning of Mansur Johnson’s book Murshid: A Personal Memoir of Life with American Sufi Samuel L. Lewis (2006).

“The great innovation that this person has introduced are the Dervish Dances. They are compilations of the Mevlevi, Rifa'i and Bedawi practices. Having been a guest of these various dervishes at times, before Allah, there is no reason not to use these methods. However, one practiced Walking for over three years before starting in this direction. [Emphasis added.] The walks were derived partly from Naqshibandí practices and partly from the instructions of Hazrat Inayat Khan on tassawuri. To this should be added some traditional practices one a word which can easily be misunderstood. It was originally spelt hagg in Hebrew and hajj in Arabic, and included walking, both in a straight line and circumambulation. This is always done along with the repetition of some sacred practice.” (March 31, 1969 to Pir Barkat Ali).


“Saturday afternoon [March 16, 1968], my work is going to be slightly more complicated, because I am adding to the work on the Walk, for a select few only, the others can sit and watch perhaps, the elements of spiritual dancing. I don’t want to teach this to more than four people…. It is necessary to get this beginning in. The Sufi dance will not be on different principles from the walk so far as the inner practice is concerned, but instead of space taking us in, we will take space in. And that is the difference between the dance and the pilgrimage.”-recording of 13 March 1968, posted at murshidsam.org as “Meeting Time with Murshid.”

“Only Sam Lewis was initiated into real Occultism by a Master many years ago. He dropped it but finding so much nonsense being paraded as 'Occultism' on is now using it to build up his ‘Dance of Universal Peace.’ This ‘Dance of Universal Peace’ came out of the ethers. It was done once at Fathepur Sikri in India, and one learned later it was placed there in the ethers by Ruth S. Denis and Ted Shawn. Of course, Sam has no access to the Akasha records, every damn fool masquerading as an 'occultist' knows that.

“Friday one is preparing for ‘Dance of Universal Peace,’ first by giving instructions in Occult Dancing. This class is small and select, but will increase on the return of several students who are away at the moment. After the Occult Dancing we shall go into Mystical Dancing and then into Ceremonial Dancing, and then Dance of Universal Peace. It is demonstrable. (May 25, 1968 to Gavin Arthur).
“Several years ago I said to Miss Ruth St. Denis 'Mother I am going to revolutionize the world.' 'How are you going to do it?' 'By teaching children how to walk.' Ruth taught me how to draw dances from the Akasha and later I told her of having performed 'Dance of Universal Peace' at Fathepur Sikri. It was the same dance that she and Ted Shawn had performed in the same place 30 years before. It is based on the rituals of the four Major Religions. And I am now training a few young people on it, showing them what our ‘superior more equal people’ a priori reject, God bless them.” (May 8, 1968 to Julie Medlock).


“One is now writing in more detail on the Sunday meeting [June 23, 1968] and sending copies to Paul Reps and the local Dr. Chaudhuri. There are things entirely out of my hands, and I'll begin rather backwards.

“A home and money have been offered to Vilayat and when some thought that Sam might be jealous, he laughed out loud. Vilayat, God bless him, has gone through the great tests foreshadowed by his father and rejected, of course, by the 'love, harmony and beauty' people who expect trust but do not give it. In one sense it is ‘often your enemies are those near and dear to you.’ There are the marks, very definite and picked up by the sensitive New Age people. He is the one who needs the Love, this person dispenses it.

“I can only accept him as a Murshid, or even a Pir-O-Murshid, and am setting about doing just what is in his mind. We had already taken the first steps to restore the ancient mysteries of the Dance. We are in agreement in accepting Miss Ruth St. Denis, and it was a joy to hear somebody show the relation between Pythagoreanism and the Mevlevis and explain what is behind the astrological mysteries. Gavin Arthur was present but hadn't the slightest idea of what it was all about. And absorbing from him we are starting to do the very things be proposed.

“If there was any theme with Vilayat it was that Knowledge is born of Love, and the fact that this impressed all these young people is most important. He has a good knowledge of cosmic philosophy growing out of his assimilation of all faiths on a much higher plane that the local ‘universal religion’ people, who have not worshipped in churches, temples, pagodas, mosques all over the world. The Universal Man was so evident.

“One of our next jobs will be to remove some of his pain. This seems to be innately and intuitively a common project. People who receive enthusiasm and applause do reach depths. These are not the Old Age emotionalists who seize vocabularies. These are the New Age people, generally with Indian 'souls,' back
to earth to continue their aeonic mission and growth.” (June 25, 1968 to Shamcher Beorse).

For another account of Murshid S.A.M.’s meeting with Pir Vilayat on June 23, 1968, see Mansur Johnson’s Murshid, pp. 73-75.

9. July 1970: Dances and Walks classes continue to develop

“Esoteric Sciences are very difficult to impart. The behavior of electricity through rubber, steel, nylon, silk, copper, etc is very different. The blockades in the breathfunctions of people may be in any part of the anatomy from the pituitary to the feet. We gave six sessions in dervish dancing, three in yoga dancing, and two on walks last night. Instead of a 15 minute reading—and the reading did not occupy more than 15 minutes—the whole sessions took 2.5 hours, at least. The Murshid-guru has to act as a CONDENSER-TRANSFORMER. This is very important and functional.” (December 5, 1968 to Paul Reps).

“I have been to Fathepur Sikri and there presented the first stage of what may be called Dances of Universal Peace. Most of our work at the present time has been centered on modernized versions of Dervish Dances, but we are also gradually adding mantric dances. In fact, I wish you could come sometime as a guest. At the moment my advanced dancing class meets on Saturday nights and a much larger group on Sunday afternoons. This group will be divided I hope, for it is very large. We also present Dervish dances on Monday night which is devoted to Sufi teachings.” (July 15, 1970 to Badruddin Daud)

Some Brief Conclusions

1. Focus on inner space and inner feeling happens first. Vision comes by grace, not in response to an audience. For 30 years after Murshid S.A.M. first met Ruth St Denis, he gestated these new creations of Walk and Dance.

2. For both the Walks and Dances, Murshid S.A.M began small, with only a few students. The Walks were a preparation for the Dances and begun three to five years before. S.A.M. originally sees the Walks as a development for childhood education, linked to his connection with his first Khalifa in Pakistan, Saadi Khawar Khan.

3. He did not envision the Dances as something large or imposing, but a development of an already existing class in the Walks, for just a few mureeds. By this own words, the first class occurred in early March 1968. He mentions this small, ongoing class several times in his correspondence in the spring of 1968. A
large public event happened a few months later on June 24 when he led the first Dervish dances, but he never mentions this event in relation to the Dances in his letters or diaries.

4. As S.A.M. says in the recording from March 1968: “It is necessary to get this beginning in. The Sufi dance will not be on different principles from the walk so far as the inner practice is concerned, but instead of space taking us in, we will take space in. And that is the difference between the dance and the pilgrimage.”

The Dances work from inside out, not outside in.
~Neil Douglas-Klotz, May 2018