



Thank you for inviting me to participate in this beautiful day of remembrance and celebration of Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan with whom I had the great pleasure and privilege to be with for many years.

I am honored to be asked to say a few words about Pir Vilayat. I usually speak spontaneously but to assist in the challenging task of simultaneous translation, (which is occurring right now) I agreed to offer a written testimony.

It is truly impossible to do justice in a few words to the vast scope of Pir Vilayat's life and work. He had a full spectrum life, a life that included intense spiritual discipline. He took 40 day retreats while fasting and repeating the zikr 22,000 times a day. As a British naval officer he participated in the landing at Normandy on D Day. He played Bach cello suites on his cello and directed choirs singing the transcendent music of Victoria, Tallis and many others.

His life was so generous. From the findings of his own spiritual quest with its encounters and discoveries he brought us so many riches. Influenced by the Rishis he met residing in stone caves high above the tree line in the Himalayas, he introduced us to the infinite through the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. From his meetings with intoxicated dervishes in Ajmer Sharif he transmitted the oneness of existence through the ecstasy and depth of *la illaha illa la hu*. From sharing in the sacred life of the monks on Mt Athos he taught us that we could participate in the sacred broken heart of Christ, could bleed with humanity, and discover new life.

In addition to the spiritual treasures he bestowed, he opened new dialogues between mystics and scientists, and founded educational and charitable organizations such as Omega Institute and The Hope Project. Each aspect of his life could be a story in itself.

Pir Vilayat is a man who defies categories or pigeonholes, rather he was a force in a human shape. If you talk to his admirers, friends, family and students (and even detractors) you will meet many different Pir Vilayats.

He was a man of contradictions, or we could say opposites. One of his favorite themes concerned the task of what he called *reconciling the irreconcilables*. Just stop and think about this for a moment.... reconciling the irreconcilables!!

What an assignment! He gave us a giant cosmic puzzle to solve, asked us to join him in an evolutionary adventure, and we signed up! Only later did we read the fine print: we would be with this for the rest of our lives, new lands would be revealed along the way and we would see things differently over and over again,... there would be support and guidance, he would always be with us, and at the end of it all, we would feel our life had been well spent!

As I said, Pir Vilayat defied easy categorization. We normally expect people to be a certain way and not two ways at once! Yet, it was these extraordinary and often baffling incongruities that made up much of Pir Vilayat's being and charisma.

He was a child of mixed race parents, living in Europe (a place neither of his parents were born in) As a brown-skinned little boy, he was a bullied outsider and later at times as an adult was treated like a second class citizen. (I remember him telling me about the taunts his fellow classmates hurled at him, "do you eat with a knife and fork?") . At the same time, he had the shelter of very loving parents who offered him not only an earthly family to belong to, but also in the radiance of his father, Hazrat Inayat Khan – a great awakened being-, he found a sense of belonging to a home beyond this world.

When Vilayat was 11, just before his father left for India and died there, he was given a public blessing and the charge to carry on his work. At around 15 or 16 Vilayat, with this immense weight on his frail shoulders, and without the means or knowing how he would accomplish this mission..., knelt as a knight and pledged himself to the service of the Message of love, harmony and beauty that his father had brought to the west. For a moment, imagine yourself at 15 taking on the gravity of such a commitment.

Later Pir Vilayat would often quote Goethe "What you inherit from your father must first be earned before it's yours."

Great strength and vulnerability lived together in Pir Vilayat. As a spiritual master, he was an exemplar of strength, mastery, and steadfastness. His life was an expression of perseverance. He simply never gave up. Despite the many difficulties, opposition and even failures, to the end of his days, he remained true to the knightly vow he made kneeling as a 16 year old boy.

Having great power and mastery did not mean that he did not also feel vulnerable at times. He lived with a broken heart. As a British naval officer in WW2 on a minesweeper (one of the most dangerous war time jobs) his ship was hit and capsized, killing many of the men. After the war, he tragically lost both his fiancé and his best friend and sister Noor. Later as a journalist he courageously became a whistleblower when he chronicled the atrocities inflicted on Algerians by French armed forces. As a result, he was ordered to leave France.

Pir Vilayat experienced the worst of humanity, but his special power was his capacity to allow the light to shine through his broken heart, and that light became a beacon for others to follow.

You can feel this when he says *“dive deeply into the miracle of life and let the tips of your wings be burnt by the flame, let your feet be lacerated by the thorns, let your heart be stirred by human emotion and let your soul be lifted beyond the earth.”*

There was no either-or with Pir Vilayat. For him, life was all about becoming wide and deep and large enough to span the whole spectrum of the human and divine experience. He was a master of meditation who could lead his students into the rarefied realms of awakened awareness and landscapes of light and pure Being. He was the epitome of transcendent knowing, yet he was not a dreamy character, detached from the joys and sorrows of this everyday life. He didn't miss a thing in this human realm. I was often surprised by his attention to and his care about the smallest details of everyday living.

An example of this is a painful memory for me concerning a spoon. Pir Vilayat was fastidious about his tea preparation which involved first the cup and pot warming, followed by the perfectly timed steeping, and finally completed by the addition of just the right amount of heated milk.

Even though I was well aware of his tea ritual, I didn't know that he took particular delight in stirring his tea with a rather unremarkable-looking spoon. One time when returning from his long teaching travels, I noticed him going through all the kitchen drawers. What are you looking for? I asked. Soon I was to find out that while reorganizing the kitchen, I had thrown out his favorite spoon. I had been oblivious to his relationship with this spoon. I felt sad about what I had done, and charmed that this man, who had so few ties to the material world, enjoyed a special connection to a rather plain, functional spoon and how he so enjoyed the simple human pastime of brewing and enjoying a fine cup of tea.

Eleanor Roosevelt said something that describes the essence of who Pir Vilayat was for so many people...*“Many people will walk in and out of your life,”* Mrs. Roosevelt said, *“but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.”* Pir Vilayat was a true friend and a remarkable man. Let us bless and remember him for his generous service and the gifts he imparted to us, many of which we only more fully come to know as we grow older and discover the challenges and conundrums of life.

I will end with his words, a summons to all of us in these times to follow his example of brave humanity and shimmering otherworldliness:

*““Dare you have the courage to be who you truly are! Let us build a beautiful world of beautiful people.””*

Taj Inayat