

REPORT TRAINING CRIMEA

Honoring our ancestors
August – September 2003

Prologue

Shahodat and Ukrainian Misha pick us up from the airport. We drive at dead man's speed into the dark of the night, avoiding car wrecks that suddenly doom us, because the headlights of the car are barely functioning. When it starts to rain Misha finds out the windshield wipers aren't functioning either. Luckily the rain stops. We stop in Evpatoria to get some cheese and bread for the next morning and we watch the cars going by. Suddenly I see something surprising. I startle and wonder what made me startle. With a shock I realize it is a car with everything functioning. One hour in the Crimea and already we're adapted to the deplorable state of the cars. On we go in the car, while we wonder what is more lethal: the driver's speed and driving or the fumes in the car. In Myrnya (place of Peace) the police stops us and checks the car. Misha proudly hands over the technical report and we drive on, as the report proves the car is in order for at least another two years to go. On we go. Allah ho Akbar!

Intermezzo

We are on an excursion to a fabulous place. An overhanging rock has created an enormous cathedral of over 100 feet high, high in the mountains. Russian Misha plays the recorder. What acoustics! The natural cathedral has a well, below which an old cherry tree has been growing for over a millennium. Yes, we perfectly understand this place was a place of worship before Christianity entered these regions.

All the time everyone is eating the berries that abound here and actually everywhere in the Crimea everything is green and flourishing. This is a rich country, measured by farmer's standards. As long as you can trade and barter. Lena proudly shows a melon, bought because it was so cheap: less than half a \$ cent. However people need to pay the same for cars and electric equipment as in the West, so by our (and their) standards, the country – rich as it is in crop, is a poor one with most people living on the edge of bearable poverty.

Finale

Because our plane goes on Tuesday, we have a few days extra in Evpatoria. Anton is our guide. He is 19 and very shy. He asked for mentorship last year and tells us his life story. Hardly ever seen his mother, who worked in another town and died young, raised by his great grandparents and now living with his grandparents. Hardly any friends. No wonder he wanted us as mentors: he needs parents! The days with us are the highlights of the year, he admits. He's studying English, but the fruits of his study don't show yet. But we manage and we're lucky with him, as our host Anna doesn't speak a word of English. Anton tells us a schoolteacher doesn't earn more than \$30 per month, 60% of which goes to rent. Naturally everyone lives with family. His dream is a house of his own in the country. That'll cost at least \$5,000 so is beyond his pocket.

Still it's good to have dreams. 'Loose your dreams and you will loose your mind, ain't life unkind', as the Rolling Stones have it (Ruby Tuesday).

The group

Shahodat expects some 20 people. We know from last year many people show up unexpected so patiently wait for the people to come in. In two days we are with some 60 attendants, well over the number of last year. People really like the combination of training and the Crimea! Most are Russians and we must admit the training is not really a Ukrainian training at all. The organizers (Shahodat and Misha) tell us they did all they could, but even reduced prices were too much for the Ukrainians to pay.

Before our training, there was another dance camp in the Crimea, back-to-back to the training. The camp was a success and balanced out financially, we were told. Later we found out the camp balanced because all costs were put towards this training...

Frankly speaking, the finances are a mess. The Camp (with only two Russian teachers) was more expensive than our training (with us as international teachers) and for the training too many people paid way below cost price.

In the end we simply calculated our travel expenses and honoraria, translated the sum into Euros and left the rest (some \$300,=) with the organizers.

Participants

Numbers are great and everyone is very enthused and willing to work with us. New students lead Dances, old friends lead Dances and keep surprising us with their skills. We regret that Jamila went home and didn't stay for our training, as we wanted to work with her further, helping her towards mentorship as we expressed in the application that she surely has read. Oh well, it's her choice. Luckily we meet our student Olga, so we can train her towards mentorship (no, not this year, she has to wait some more). Also Ukrainian Anton is not present. His grandparents don't approve of the Dances. He later tells us that his grandparents are very ill and he can't be away from them. Evpatoria is within an hour of our camp site, we let him escape with his rendering of course.

Many students weren't informed about the bursary conditions, so many chose between this training and the one Narayan gave earlier this year, back to back to the Solstice Camp. So we had some new faces and missed some familiar ones

We find ourselves in a new role. Or maybe with our own children leaving the house, we are more aware of a role we have been playing for a longer time, always co-leading as a couple. We realize we are the 'camp parents' of a group of children and teenagers. Young Marina (four years of age now and expert in a head-banging style of zikr) again is present with her granny and dances next to Ariënne all the time, as Anya used to do when she was ten. At home all her dolls are called 'Ariënne'. Anya now is 15 and brought her four year older sister Masha and of course her mother Hayat, our mureed and mentee. Galina is with her drumming daughter Amina. Of course Shahodat's two daughters are also present. They love us and we love them. The atmosphere of their enthusiasm (Amina & Masha) and earnest (Anya) really adds to the camp. Masha in the end thanks us for taking such good care for her mother and sister.

Program

Using the same time table as last year, we again experienced how keenly everyone wants to attend every session, including the early Sufi morning practices with the Fatiha. Invariably our first students to come are two lovely dogs. These love dogs come running to us every morning we walk the sandy path to the tent. Later in the week a third dog completes the chorus.

The mornings offered some great teaching from emerging teachers, plus of course some charming experiences with not so well experienced beginners. All lead us into well known and published Dances, as we are strict in wanting new dance leaders to start with good material.

The evenings are ours to lead, but we occasionally invite Shahodat, Olga and Katya to help us out. Later in the week we offer them a whole evening session. Good for them, also good for us. It is hard work, running a training camp from 7.30 in the morning till well over 10 pm for 10 days on a row!

The afternoon classes with Sufi talks about SAM's teachers and of course Sam himself is very lively with much dialogue and very good questions asked by the participants. Every time we start with the Introductory Bismillah: Two circles, ten Allah's! and Olga leads us into a wonderful and focused Rahmat. Every class not only focused on a teacher, but also on a subject and to our delight we hear our words back in the self-given feedback of teachers: 'I wanted to stay clear away from sentimentality'. Besides sentimentality we cover issues like what is a good Dance (the Foundation material), rhythm and structure, mantras or not, transmission as a way to get deeper into the dance, the group as mirroring your own state, using your own realization rather than the text from booklets etc and enter the areas of the beginning and history of the Dances towards the present situation, the Network and mentoring.

We ourselves felt the support of our family from last year's Jamiat Khas, which strengthened us in our way of working in these regions. We feel blessed, for where can we work with so many devoted students on subject that are so dear to us?

For a summer training in a tent the atmosphere was very good and focused. Actually some people complain that there is so much rhythm and focus in the camp and the time table (with ample time for swimming etc.) that this really is not a holiday camp. We see it as a compliment and laugh at the same time, for we do get to swim every day (between the 'Medusas', as jelly fish are called in Russian) and have time to prepare class and evening program.

Generally the atmosphere is very lively and open. People are more inclined to give their opinion than we're used to in these areas and we invite them more and more to open up, for what they say and ask is the main material we want to work with. Also people ask more for private talks and interviews than before. It sure keeps us busy!

Of course we visit the tekke again (see last year's report). Again television is present and broadcasting our zikr morning. With the experience of last year's Fatiha in mind we decide for something else this time (never try to repeat something as good as that) and we lead the participants into zikr, using some of Pir Shabda's zikrs. What a powerful place this tekke is!

Future

Near the end of the camp we have a long talk with Misha and Shahodat (Russia) and Olga (Ukraine). The Russians want a continuation of the training. Numbers and the experience prove the value of this formula. However Olga thinks different. This clearly doesn't appeal (yet) to the Ukrainians, so she suggest a more free and unstructured camp (Inlakesh style) to draw in Ukrainians. A training only works for the Ukraine if more Ukrainians are committed to the Dances and in her vision a free camp is the way to make this connection. We admit that no one forbids Shahodat to run a Russian training camp in the Ukraine, but we definitely want to work in the Ukraine with Ukrainians as well. Although we personally opt for a more focused way of working, she definitely wants us to be at the camp and in the end we give in. Shahodat is a good sport and offers her help, as she has experience in organizing the Inlakesh Camp (which is run by Jamila, who this year invited Mark Havill for more focus towards Sufism) . So we conclude to work towards a open and free camp next year, followed by a (hopefully more Ukrainian) training the following year.

A good compromise, where all are cooperating in what seems best for the country/region.

September 2003, Wali & Ariënne