

Winter Retreat Estonia, Jan 27 - Feb 3 2001

BACKGROUND

January 2000 we were invited by our then mentor James Burgess, who has been leading dance circles in the Baltics for a number of years, to co-lead a Dance retreat in Estonia. As it happened James fell ill at the very beginning and we had to carry the retreat to an end. Our focus was on the Aramaic class for Lord's Prayer lent 'backbone' for whole retreat followed and some of the theme of the day.

At the end of this to continue this re-withdraw from Estonia had several men-Riga, we consecus on it as a three With a generous



Project we were able to enter this first year of this course, with additional outreach work to Russia, the Baltics or the Ukraine. Also our participation in the Latvia Camp (this year for the first time in a tent, also a gift from ONEness) inshallah will serve the Dance climate in these regions.

Aramaic Jesus, with an one line each day. The proved to be an excellent retreat, as the lowered the atmosphere deeper meanings of the

retreat James asked us treat, as he wanted to tonia. As we already tees in both Russia and quently decided to fo-year training course. grant from ONEness

PROGRAM

7.00 - 8.00 Sufi Practices

element breath, general practices (Bismillah, Erahman-Erahim, Allah Hu etc.) working towards introducing the wazifa's Ya Hadi - Ya Hayyo - Ya Qayyum in the second half of the retreat. Most people of the group attended this and the next hour, which allowed the group as a whole to start the day as a community in prayer, working towards a common rhythm and breathing. Thus these practices not only deepened the live experience in Sufism, but also were group binding in creating a common rhythm & breathing.

8.00 - 9.00 Zikr

Sung with guitar accompaniment. This zikhr (The Mulla Cycle, an original cycle which over a number of years grew out of our morning practices) was danced on Thursday evening. This session brought the more inward practises to both expression and introspection and aimed to bring balance in expressing the jelal and jermal qualities and bringing them to Iskh.

10.30 - 11.00 Pow Wow

Starting with Nasrudin's story of the day, with sometimes sharing, sometimes announcements, sometimes explanation from us on the retreat process. The Pow Wow was new for this format retreat and aimed to further enhance the group feeling. Also it was a possible outlet for commentary and such. As such it added to the feeling of this retreat being a 'winter camp'.

11.00 - 12.00 Dance session emerging teachers

The emerging teachers this time were Fatima and Shahodat, both mentees of ours. Unfortunately our mentee Helena from Russia was unable to attend this retreat.

The session of course is open for emerging teachers in general, but other leaders like Rahima or Jamila (St. Petersburg) and Gary or Latifa (Riga) were for various reasons unable to participate.

Silje, the one certified teacher in the Baltics, focused this session. This enabled her to get more experience in working out order of the program etc. With this we also hope to empower her. Our interference with her programming was never necessary. The teachers were free in their choice of Foundation Dances (we didn't allow their own creations), without a special theme to focus on.

On our invitation Silje led one of these morning session on her own.

11.00 - 12.00 Planetary Walks

We sacrificed one ET session for the walks, presenting the walks of the pairs Sun and Moon and Saturn and Jupiter with their combinations. This followed our presentation of the element walks from last year.

This session was originally planned for tassawuri walks on the Prophets, led by Valodia (Wolly). Unfortunately work prevented him to lead these walks.

12.00 -13.00 teachers feedback.

This feedback session was open for all interested and was each morning attended by some dozen people. Apart from leadership styles and commentaries, the feedback given was also focused on a greater understanding of using the elements as a way of analysis, a deeper understanding of problems in starting or ending a dance and the middle part, the order of a program etc.

15.30 -17.30 Sufi Class

Our theme for the Sufi class was the Invocation, focusing on one part (Towards the One; the Perfection of Love; Harmony and Beauty; the Only being etc.) every day. By this we hoped to create a deeper understanding of both the Invocation, the work of Hazrat Inayat Khan and Samuel Lewis and the relation of their work with Eastern Sufism (e.g. Towards the One and Bismillah; the relation with the Fatihah). Additional to this we used linked themes from Desert Wisdom. The theme Love, Harmony and Beauty allowed us to enter the world of rhythm, essential for SAM's teachings on Sufism and the Dances.

The theme 'the embodiment of the master' was used for a class entirely on Samuel Lewis, his life, the background of the Dances etc.

We carefully always tried to name the source of our material and quotes (mainly Hazrat Inayat Khan, Samuel Lewis and some Saadi and Rumi), so the participants realized the material was not 'our' idea of Sufism, but general outlines of the major teachers of our Order.

Embedded in the class each day were one or two dances, explained in fuller esoteric detail than is usual in a Dance session, and some walking meditation (e.g. Towards the One) and practices (e.g. Darood).

20.00 - 22.00 Dance evening

These sessions were led by us and aimed to bring the experiences of the day to fullness in the Dances by grounding and deepening them. The day of the theme 'United with all the illuminated souls' we followed in dances the order of the Universal Worship. On Thursday (Sufi day) we presented the Mulla Cycle that we had been singing in the early morning hours. As an introduction to this, Shahodat led the group in the healing ritual of the DHO. The other evenings we generally drew from the large body of Foundation Dances, SAM's originals and the Aramaic/Desert Wisdom work, adding to this some of our own material.

MAIN FOCUS

1. Silence or not?

From the beginning several people put forward their wish to have the retreat in silence. This didn't surprise us, as James has been doing silent retreats in the Baltics and many of the participants are familiar with his work. In answering this issue we explained one of our aims of this retreat: to focus on the relation between the Dances and every day reality. Outer silence helps to create inner silence, as also do the Dances. The real practice is to keep (or try to keep some of) the inner silence in everyday life. A silence retreat is working with your inner self, in a retreat where silence is not held, you work with yourself in relation to the other.

2. Dancing and daily life

A second issue for us was the relation between the Dances and the atmosphere/attunement felt in the dance room and the 'normal world' or daily life of the dining room. Some of this was explained in Pow Wow, some in Sufi class in connection with hal/makam and Batin-Zahir.

The Pow Wow itself proved to be a connection between the inner and the outer and was a welcome outlet for some sharing (not every day) or unscheduled but necessary comments (like on silence, on curfew etc.). All this was dealt with as much emphasis on everyone's personal responsibility, rather than 'the teacher' solving all.

3. Humour

Part of our teaching has been the humour as expressed in the teaching stories of Nasrudin. These stories were used both in class and Pow Wow as a comment on the situation of the day, issues that came up and the theme of the invocation. By starting Pow Wow and Sufi class with a story, Nasrudin also became our timekeeper (always a difficult issue in these countries). Some of these stories we explained, some we left to the unconscious to unravel. The Nasrudin doll, presented to us by Shahodat made Nasrudin even more present.

4. Confusion

Our work with humour and life energy (Hayy) was confusing to the participants, as was our answer to the request for silence. We, both trained by James, in fact have a style that is quite different from his and is more based on invitation than discipline (in Kabala terms more *chesed* than *gevura* so to speak). This of course was not new to the Russian and Dutch dancers, but it was for the Baltic people. Some of them expressed near the end that this style of working created as much depth as a silence and disciplined retreat, but of course more enthusiasm (which in fact literally is 'inspiration by God').

5. Fire and groundedness

From the very beginning there was a great amount of uncontrolled fire in the group. The freedom we gave the group (no 'rules' but rather requests and invitations to have a certain experience) was difficult for them to handle, but even more so was the joy and life energy (Hayy) with which we worked. We answered this fire by presenting quite a few Fire dances, adding Earth by a strong sense of controlled rhythm and speed. This also worked as a training for some of the irregular drumming (speeding up the Dances with every DUM).

As the group lacked being grounded, we also chose for Water-Earth and Air-Earth type Dances, rather than entering the area of more pure Water or Air.

When given the responsibility (as in the evening session following the order of the Universal worship) and the proper instructions, all worked well (there is a high amount of discipline), but we got the feeling that instructions are more obeyed than sufficiently internalised.

Some people mentioned afterwards that they returned from the retreat more grounded than they had expected beforehand.

Yet we feel more work has to be done in this area to create a better balance and a more controlled fire and a stronger sense of being grounded.

6. Teachers and part of the group

As teachers we of course enjoyed some privileges, like our own room and time for ourselves to prepare the program. However we joined in the process of chopping wood for the stoves, doing dishes and the like, to emphasise that teachers are teachers in the dance room, but ordinary people outside the dance room and to prevent the teacher (both the person and the archetype) from being put on a pedestal. This was put in Sufi context in the Sufi class by Inayat Khan's teachings on the best teacher being a student and the fact that there is only one Teacher and the concept of the *Abdullah* (and SAM's dance & life story).

THE GROUP

1. Numbers and nationalities

The group consisted of 20 -30 people, with more or less equal numbers from Estonia, Russia and Latvia and one dancer from Lithuania. Added to this were six people from the Netherlands. If this interest from outside the Baltics or Russia stays or grows, we will have to limit the numbers of 'foreigners from the West' as they don't form the real focus of this retreat. Some 5 or 6 do gave the retreat a more international flavour and did add to the whole atmosphere in general.

The political situation in the Baltics is complex, as in the past Russians did not mix with the local population and indeed until the present day do not speak the native language, even after some generations.

Realising that in this group former oppressor and oppressed danced together was for us an extra proof of the value of Dancing, Eating and Praying as a practical, deep way to Peace, based on experience.

2. Language

The political situation directly leads to the problem of language. The choice of English and Russian was the obvious choice and proved useful. Yet for a next time we will address the issue more explicitly and will apologise for not translating into the language of the country (Estonian). Most dancers in the Baltics are originally Russian speaking people. The use of the Russian language may account for the relative small number of native speakers in the Dance circles. We would welcome some more general or specific ideas and suggestions in this.

3. Background

Most of the Baltic participants have been dancing for a number of years with James Burgess, who pioneered in these regions, and are experienced dancers. Most also followed one or more silent retreats with him and quite a few belong or belonged to his Study Group.

The Russian dancers all are part of the St. Petersburg dance community and are also experienced dancers. The love for Sufism is very strong in this circle.

The Dutch group was a mix between experienced dancers and relative newcomers. In Holland interest in Sufism is mainly expressed through Universal worship or organized gatherings and meetings. Dancing is not (yet) seen as part of Sufism as it is in Russia/The Baltics

GENERAL COMMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

We feel this retreat served its goal as the beginning of a three-year training program. By linking it to a Sufi theme (Towards the One) we hope it also served its role as a vehicle for a deeper understanding of Sufism. A lot of work still has to be done, both in experiencing Sufism as in providing the broader range of people with background, but in gratitude we did feel all the work that has been done already.

Using the theme of the class as a backbone of the retreat provided the retreat with a strong focus and rhythm and enabled us at the same time to work freely around the theme, focusing on what issue or problem needed to be addressed each day.

For next year we hope to find a theme as strong as this by working with the Unity of Religious Ideals in the order presented by Inayat Khan. The emerging teachers and Silje expressed they would welcome this theme, as their understanding of some basics of the different traditions is

necessary for both leading a broad range of different Dances, as expressed in the rules for certification.

As preparation of the theme we would welcome some Russian editions of The Unity of religious Ideals (if existing), to be read beforehand by Silje and (some of the) emerging teachers.

All experienced the rhythm of the program as pleasant, leaving time for walk and talk, but holding the focus of a retreat-like week.

We feel more emphasis is needed on understanding of the elements and the planets (through walks and awareness of these archetypes as ways of analysing and focusing on behaviour).

Also the links between the world of a retreat (in silence or not) or a dance session and everyday life need not be neglected.

Feedback

Dhyan (Lithuania):

Going to this retreat I had a purpose to feel better what are Dances of Universal Peace and to adopt teaching from teachers duet - Wali and Arienne.

Our day was starting with morning practices, which gave a special depth for all sessions of coming day. These practices were very close and important to me. And after them - we were living like a one dancing family, which intention was - "Towards the One, towards higher self". It was very nice to feel that this works not only during the dance sessions but also when we were resting, eating, communicating.

There was a new experience for me, how during the retreat it's possible to communicate actively at the same time not losing the inner feeling, brought from the practices hall.

There were very useful sessions for the future dance leaders. Doing the dance out of inner world and love for dancing circle had a very clear priority for me against the technical dance elements. It was a very important conclusion for me. And I feel very grateful for this not only to Wali and Arienne but also to the young dance leaders. I really hope to pass this experience which I've got in retreat to my Lithuanian friends. It gave me stimulus to develop Dances of Universal Peace in Lithuania.

Ya Shakoor - my gratitude to teachers Wali and Arienne.

with love, Dhyan

Fatima (Latvia):

Dear Wali and Arienne,

at last I'm writing to you my impressions about dance retreat in Estonia. I was needed some time to comprehend my feelings and thoughts. Besides that in Riga there is Ralfs Nimmans now, who leads our Fraidies, makes own seminars and dramming and singing classes.

As to my impressions, the first is a great feeling of Unity which I have received from this seminar. It is great idea to gather together so different people from very different states and then to learn them dances, songs, funny stories by Nusruddin. And as in beginning I felt some constraint with people from Holand as in the end of seminar I seen that they have such problems and thoughts and inner life like me.

And also I have lots and lots of gratitude to Wali and Arienne for them workmanship to do from separate groups of people one simple brotherhood in one week time.

Now as to my training as a dance leader. I have received a lot of support of my mentors and not only by words, but mainly by movements, voices, mood and tuning. It's so important for

me, because I badly can study music, melody and dances and also foreign languages from books or tapes, only from real examples.

Also I have seen how lead dances Shahodad from Russia. It is very helpful experience for me. When is possibility to see a good work of other new leaders it help to see own mistakes.

After this retreat according to advise of my mentors I began to translate some texts from the book by Hazrat Inayat Khan "The Unity of Religions".

After retreat I had two weeks rest from dance leading because there is Ralf, who leads now our Friday evenings, and last Friday I began leaded again. It was the dance "Sita Ram Bolo Pyare" and I leaded it more deeply and for a long time as before retreat. It was really nice and we lost our feeling of time suddenly.

Also the photo from retreat help me to provoke the interest to the Dances and to the dance teachers among new people.

I have some feed back about retreat from Ludmila too.

She did not wait anything from this retreat and suddenly she received so great powerful effect from this. She felt really big energy and force. It was so pleasant surprise for her.

Also she have seen the perfect pair, twin work of Wali and Arienne. And it was a good synthesis of two dance schools – Arienne by James and Wali by Saadi. And the last effect of this synthesis is quite new quality of dance workshop, which belongs by right to Wali and Arienne. (And I agree with Luda, maybe for me it is the ideal of the pair work on the whole). And it is very good for the further development of the DUP.

I didn't speak with Ilona (Vitalija) about retreat because she is very busy with Ralf's arrival. But I see this effect in the real life – Ilona do all the simultaneous translation, when Ralf lead dances on our Fridays, seminars and drumming and singing classes.

And Maria don't like speak on the whole so I didn't ask her.

With love, Fatima.

Shahodat (Russia):

Dear Wali and Arienne!

I was sure you received my report. Excuse me, if it is not too late please accept it. I always feel your love and support. I am looking forward to seeing you.

1. First experience of retreat like that. Big gratitude to Teachers, Wali, Arienne and to Eric Narayan (Oneness) for the opportunity to be at the retreat.
2. This retreat brought me many useful things, deeper feeling of Dances of Universal Peace. Understanding Invocation and the depth of the Message.
3. Touching and inspiration from elements and planets' walks.
4. Walks' influence before the beginning of Dance class.
5. Practical help in hearing of the dance rhythm. Tuning.
6. Work on organizing the program for the Dances.
7. All the seminar is like a push forward and inspiration to to keep on going in study of the DUP.

My bow to everybody and gratitude, Shahodat

Silje (Estonia):

Winter is a great time to look inside you, and one way to do this is to do it through the Dances of Universal Peace. I love the Dances of Universal Peace very much and I have got many Dance friends during the years from different countries, who are involved in Dances. It have

always been a gift to be together with them. But in several reasons it have happened not very often. In January, this year it realized in Estonia at Dance retreat leading by Arienne and Wali. We were very glad to meet here dancers from Holland, Russia, Latvia and Lithuania. It was opportunity to be together in intimate and warm love atmosphere.

We had the wonderful Dance sessions and sufi-class experiences. Beside Wali and Ariëne the different leaders got opportunity to lead the Dances. This gave us possibility to learn from each other, from our individual strong sides, also from our mistakes. Dance leaders feedback, gave by Ariëne and Wali, was very useful for all of us, as well for those who haven't led Dances yet.

For me personally, it was also a great experience to play the guitar together with such wonderful player as Wali. I learned so much in this way.

The Dance retreat was very inspiring to go on with the Dances. Our deep gratitude to those people, who made this retreat possible!

Many, many thanks!

May all beings be well! May all beings be happy! Peace! Peace! Peace!

In the name of Estonian dancers
with love, Silje