

## Report Kaliningrad, Russia May 20 – 21 2006



*What a trip! To economize we drove 300 km to the airport Dortmund, then flew to Gdansk, where Polish Lech Walesa started the Polish freedom movement, then next day the 4 hour trip by bus to Kaliningrad (first time we crossed the Russian border on wheels and not in the air!) and the same way back, but it enabled us to meet with the organizers of the Polish Dance and Sufi Camp – the first one of its kind – that we inshallah will attend this summer. This proved a welcome and much needed basis for the next Polish adventure.*

*Kaliningrad – now a Russian enclave in a corner of the Baltic Sea between Poland and Lithuania – once was a flourishing German town (Koningsbergen), the home town of philosopher Immanuel Kant. As the English bombed this marine harbor in WW II, the center is plastered with concrete and old tokens of earlier riches (so clear in other Hanze trade cities*

*like Gdansk, Riga and Tallinn) are rare in Kaliningrad.*

*All in all it was a very time consuming trip of a full week for 'just' two days of workshop and little honoraria, but traveling this way you are likely to find yourself in remarkable circumstances: on the return trip our bus was full of Polish people, trying to smuggle their contraband of cheap vodka and cigarettes across the border. Two were caught and we had to wait an extra half hour on top of the 1,5 hours for passport control for their 'straff' (penalty). A long trip but we weren't bored for a minute!*

*Shortly before the workshop we received a note from organizer Hayat – our mentee and mureed – that she had turned to the Russian Orthodox faith. She earlier had bought a book on Russian Prayers as inspiration for possible Dances from the Russian tradition and as a result was converted to the Russian Orthodox faith! We inevitably had some talks on religion, all translated by her confused daughter Anya – also our mureed – who wanted to stay loyal to her mother and to us and of course eventually to her inner beliefs that were being tested. Trying to give a good example to Anya, we let Hayat do most of the talking and in the end congratulated her with finding her path and respected this, just as we expected her to respect the path and conviction of others. Hayat had stopped dances for a while as she couldn't work it out with her new faith.*



*The Russian Orthodox faith doesn't celebrate Christmas, but has Easter as main celebration. Not the resurrection, but the actual suffering is the core of this Russian church tradition. The church gives an escape to a dreary life and basically claims that suffering is bringing you closer to Jesus (so to God), as Jesus suffered as well. Just the faith you would expect in a poor and suffering country, although this kind of Christian tassawuri may very well be not be what they need. With the claim that the Orthodox Church is the one and only real Christian faith, the church doesn't leave much space for more positive thinking...*

*Anya is 18 and this season has started her studies Polish language and mythology. She worked ahead to have time free for our stay. Her sister Masha (we all have known them since they were 10 years younger) is now 23 and just finished her University study biology. In Russia all children get their degrees and all are motivated to study, but somehow there are no jobs for university graduates, so Masha is hoping to become a waiter for the time being.*



*The venue was difficult. Vast and with completely dry acoustics with a group too small for two circles and (for this venue) too big for one circle. We had to use all our Solar and Jupiter energy and the top of our voices to create some sort of energy and by the evening were worn out. The next day grace came and the whole group danced with wings. The somewhat smaller group made the circle tighter and the acoustics better.*

*We translated our recent experiences in the dances and worked with the Unity of Religious Ideals, tolerance, acceptance and reconciliation. After the workshop Hayat made it clear that she will continue leading the dances and realized she needed help. With Luta and Alexander she will take up the dances once more. I guess we were just in time...*

*We worked two days from 11 am until 7 pm with a lunch break around three for the best part of an hour. So two session per day, as is usual in Russia, leading to actually more hours of dancing (7) then with the*

regular three session (morning –afternoon – evening, usually adding up to 6 hours of dancing) as we're used to in the West.

There were no musicians or other teachers to help us out. We offered Hayat to lead a Dance or two but she did not feel up to it. Ilia was keen on learning to drum, had bought a drum but couldn't yet use it. Wali gave him some instructions which set him off. We hope he will learn more from Pavel at the Russian Sufi Camp this summer.

We started off with some general dances and then set down for a round of names, questions and an introduction to the dances. A question on the meaning of the movements led us to a set of SAM Dances, followed by a set of Buddhist Dances. After lunch questions on zikr led us to the discussion on excitement versus ecstasy (very acute in Russia) and some zikr dances. We weaved in *Ruh Allah* more specifically for Anya, leading us to a last set with Aramaic Dances.

The next day we organized the program towards the *Sulha Dance* (a dance about reconciliation) and a Sufi practice, centering on the three prophets Mozes, Jesus and Mohammed. After lunch we did a danced Universal Worship, focusing also on the lighter side of the dances and singing 'Thy Light is in all Forms' in English and Russian in between the dances & the lighting of the candles. The sharing thereafter brought a lot of very good feedback with most participants talking about how their hearts had expanded and opened. We closed with lighthearted dances (a nigun and 'From the circle of Love' alternating in Russian and English).

As you can tell from what we wrote above, the situation was much different from what we expected. However it felt that our coming has been very well timed: Divine Providence once again. We feel we gave Anya the support she needed so much, were able to show her in practice how the Dances and Sufism can create an atmosphere of understanding and tolerance and how you can work with inner turmoil and stress through the dances. At the same time it is fortunate that due to our coming, Hayat is picking up the dances again and accepts help from others.

Heure, May 2006, Wali & Ariënne