

## A Weekend with Wali & Ariënne in Saratov, Russia September 28 – October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006

*Long before the actual weekend it became clear that the planned weekend in Saratov would have a different character than expected: Katya surprised us by writing she was pregnant and would give birth around the time of the workshop. Katya and the two of us decided to continue the workshop anyway, postponing it almost a full month, but Katya, now married and living in Moscow, didn't make it to Saratov. She had other things on her mind! We did visit her in Moscow on our way back. It was a joy to see her happily mothering, Russian style.*

*A novelty for us was that we for the first time took a long distance train (with couchette). Apart from saving money, we also wanted the experience. In Russia everything less than 12 hours by train is considered 'close' (only a night by train), so we started right away with a long distance, for our trip took 16 hours. Our mentee Anya from Moscow escorted us, on the way back we were a whole party with Anya, Sveta from Perm and young Zhenya (Samara). We paid for the whole compartment, allowing our friends to join us. Even that was much cheaper than flying and besides, they had warned us: don't try and travel like this on your own as Westerners. We now think: yes, not the first time, so we'll see about that!*

*In Saratov things had moved on after Katya leaving and we experienced the group as mature and more together than the first time, though we missed some sparks. Following our own feeling and following up on the E-mails with Lena, Arkady and Nadya (the organizers) we decided to give a training without feedback but by teaching from example. We choose Prayer as a theme and weaved the workshop around the Fatiha and Lord's Prayer and the Gayatri (thank you, Bernie) in both dances and dharma talk. The mix of dances and dharmatalk again proved a good way of linking dances with spirituality and allowing the participants to experience the depth of the dances by themselves.*

*Nadya and Arkady were proud to tell us they had booked by far the best venue of the whole area. It was a long drive, but seemed worth it, until we discovered more people though highly of this venue: One floor below a wedding party started. After the mutual YES, a pop band added to the joy, making it impossible for us to speak for some moments. Yes, next day there also will be a wedding, they announced... We are talking about a room that costs almost as much as in the West, but no one complained as they considered everything normal. No matter how often you visit, Russia keeps surprising you.*

*At the beginning we had a talk with the organizers about the content of the workshop, at the end we had a long session with them on their experience, on feedback et cetera. All had to be arranged as none spoke English and we dearly missed the casual conversations that often contain so much guidance!*

*Lena, a voice teacher and choir director, is more musician than dance leader and told us she now understood more the spiritual background of the dances and is longing for more and deeper training to develop her dances and inner being.*

*Arkadi is a professional drummer who amazed us the first time, but now was drumming too extravagant. He could use some guidance in controlling his fire, which Wali gave him the second day.*

*Nadya proved a very able organizer and maintainer of the Saratov Dance Circle, but basically Nadya, Arkadi and Lena all are unguided (officially only Nadya is mentored by Vasudeva) and that also shows. There is still a lot of work to do over there. Fortunately Saratov has a tradition of inviting Russian teachers like Bo and this time they also will invite Sveta from Perm, who had come all the way to Saratov to be with us and receive bayat (as she missed the Ruhaniat Summer School earlier this year).*

*Even though we hadn't been here but once, the banya (wet sauna) already was a tradition, so the end of the weekend was hot and cleansing. We needed it, for the hot water had been cut off where we lodged, so we sure could use some hot water!*

### **Lessons learned**

1. Russia keeps surprising you.
2. Women in the fertile age get pregnant. So don't put all your cards on young female organizers.
3. Russian couchettes are not really designed for sleeping, but you can have great interviews with mentees and mureeds.
4. In the end it is the spiritual side of the dances that counts and will survive, not the 'recreational' side.
5. We love to be in Russia and have fallen in love with the people, but never could live in this country where 'coping with' seems to be the natural thing to do at all times. Are we too spoilt or are they too crazy to take it all without protest? Both, we guess.

## Feedback

Nadya (Saratov): I want to add that the work during the seminar was very deep, especially the Aramaic prayer. We danced it for the first time in Saratov and the atmosphere created was very special. After the seminar our dance circle grew bigger as new people started coming and bringing friends with them.

Anya (Moscow): How much time has passed since the seminar in Saratov but the memories are still vivid and clear - and weather practically hasn't changed since then. These bright memories keep my soul warm and I guess won't fade for a long time. As we were going to Saratov by train and talking or walking around the airport and the railway station with our luggage I felt joy from meeting my teachers, my good old friends.

The seminar in Saratov was wonderful. There were beautiful new and known dances marvelously lead by Wali and Arienne. The seed which they bring found a good ground among the open souls in Saratov dance circle. What a language! Well it's because I still recall the feeling of this trip.

It was so nice to meet old friends! As well as to find new ones. I was very happy to meet my sister (this is how I feel it in my heart) Zhenya from Samara, who did long translations from Russian into English and back

We had such a serious talk in the train back to Moscow. And because our relations were so deep, respectful and strong they produced serious and interesting plans for future. I recall with warmth the Nasrudin story which Wali told us in the evening. As I saw later I understood its meaning absolutely the opposite. In other words I feel this trip has been very meaningful for me, hope that for other people too. So many-many thanks to those nice and bright beings who gave me a grant for this trip and participation in the seminar. Because I think it's all been great! Alhamdulillah

Zhenya (Samara): his seminar has been for me a reunion with my friends and although I came from another city I felt like being in a big and caring family. I'm very thankful to Wali and Arienne for the theme which they have chosen - bringing peace to the East-West relations, because it's one of the most important things for me in the dances - to feel that I can help other people who are not around, that through the circle we can create something beautiful that will spread. I'm also very happy that I had the chance to translate the seminar, the talks which Wali and Arienne gave about the origins of dances, about murshid Sam and Sufism. I didn't regard it as my work, but as a wonderful chance to practice being a 'rasul'. Many many thanks to all those who made this seminar possible