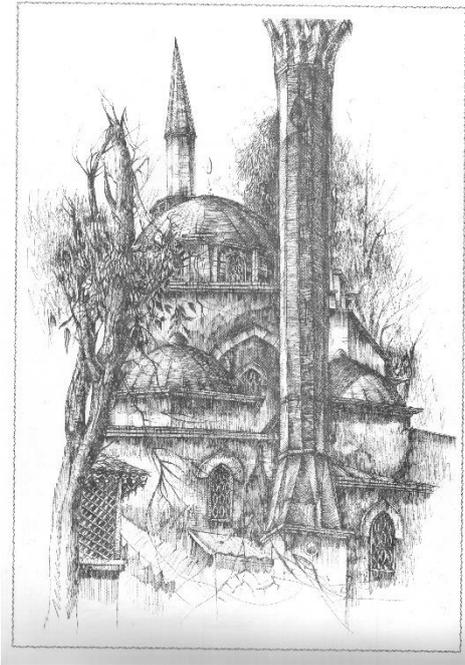


Don't Pray for me, Pray for the Tekke



Mosque in Efpatoria, Crimea

On September 11, 2002, my partner Ariënne and I were in the Crimea, Ukraine, in the 500-year-old Mevlevi tekke. There and then, a vision of sharing the Fatiha and the Aramaic Lord's Prayer became a reality.

Compared to the 2,500-year-old history of the town of Efpatoria, the tekke is relatively young, but the guardian, Alifia Hanum, proudly tells us this is the oldest Mevlevi tekke outside of Turkey. Underneath the floor of the dome-shaped sanctuary a number of Sufi saints are buried, as the story goes. As I strum my guitar the energy is so high I need to brace and earth myself. What a place and what a blessing that we are invited to lead a zikr here!

We are in the Crimea to give a weeklong training, followed by another week of camp on 'The Unity of Religious Ideals' to some 50 students from all over

Russia, Ukraine and even the Baltics. We think of ourselves as travelers, but many participants spent days on the train to get here in the Crimea at the borders of the Black Sea.

It is Thursday and near the end of the training camp. We are invited to the tekke to lead the group into a series of zikr-type Dances as an introduction to the living experience of Sufism and Islam. Abdu Ghanee, the imam of the local mosque, is also present as the imam of the tekke and he invites us over for the regular weekly service next week, which is not on a Friday, but on a Wednesday.

The imam is a man in his thirties who radiates spirituality from every pore of his body. He gives us carte blanche on how to perform the service, in keeping with the long Crimean history with Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He tells us the weekly service in the tekke is open to all faiths.

We don't have to think twice, for next Wednesday is September 11th. All during the training, we have been offering the Fatiha as an early morning practice to prepare for this day to chant the Fatiha, in keeping with the wish of Saadi to use his musical meditation on the Fatiha as a prayer for peace, especially after September 11, now one year ago.

Earlier this summer, we taught the Fatiha at the Dutch Summer Camp. There, we envisioned peace in the world if we as Westerners would sing the Fatiha and Muslims would sing or Dance the Aramaic Lord's Prayer.



Dancing in the Tekke



Nine eleven, 2002. At the tekke we all sit down in a crescent, fifty campers. Some fifteen local Muslims, mainly women, curiously stand somewhat apart. After a short explanation and invocation of Inayat Khan's Invocation and the Fatiha, we start chanting. The one-and-a-half week of practice pays off. We all sing from the heart – no papers needed – and I know this is what we have worked for. Samuel Lewis wrote: 'Any problems that or questions that which have no relation to *Fatiha* or the Lord's prayer are outside my duties in life.'¹

I realize how true this is: there are no problems or questions that aren't touched by these prayers. After the prayer Ariënne and I don't even have to look at one another, for we both know the Aramaic Lord's Prayer will be next. All join in and our vision is becoming a reality as we dance with our Russian and

Ukrainian friends and the local Muslims, who all join us.

After the Dance, we say a word of prayer and invite Abdu Ghanee to close the meeting. He treats us to some beautiful sura-chanting and addresses his community in Russian. Later he explains he told his community we'd always be welcome in this tekke, which is meant for the universality of religions.

He himself might not be there to welcome us, as these are troublesome times. To Ariënne and me he explains that his superiors have seen the television broadcasting of our first visit. They were strongly against us visiting the tekke a second time, as we 'are not true Muslims'. The price for him inviting us may very well be his job in Efpatoria as imam. We listen to him, shocked and at the same time in awe of such surrendering to a greater cause for spiritual liberty. To us he is an example of a true Muslim in the very sense of the word: someone who embodies surrendering. Our eyes meet and I answer that we will remember him in our prayers. His answer is yet another example of surrendering: 'I am not important. Don't pray for me, pray for the tekke.'



Wali & Ariënne with our Russian friend Mischa and the caretaker of the Tekke, Halifia Hanum.

¹ Letter-diary March 17th 1963, in Samuel L. Lewis (ed. Neil Douglas-Klotz): *Sufi Vision and Initiation*. Sufi Islamia/Prophecy Publications 1987, p. 316.

Epilogue:

It's November and Malika, a Dutch woman who has lived in Russia for several years, joins us for our Dutch training course. She tells us that the Dances gained a lot of interest in the Crimea due to the broadcasting and articles in the local journals of our visit. Ariënne and I are 'local celebrities' (which isn't saying much, anyone who travels to these faraway places is one), but for the imam things turned out differently: he lost his job.

I set to writing this article for *We Circle Around* and at the same time know I'll ask our Russian friends to translate it into Russian, so it can somehow reach Efpatoria, the imam and the tekke.