

## PEACE IN MOTION NEWSLETTER FALL 2010

We're still on the road and typing away in the small Russian kitchen of Aliela, our Moscow host and with Natasha co-organizer of the Russian Fall Retreat. One more day of Moscow and then we go home. Yesterday we went out on our own, marveling at the megalomania of some of the buildings with doors over 5 meters high, porches of 10 meters and even a thermometer, three times Ariëne's size! We can't resist a photo, touristic as it will come out. Building blocks are over 100 meters wide and with a beautiful Art Deco façade and the shop we enter by change could easily charge an entrance fee, as it is like a museum of Art Deco decoration.



And all these churches! There must be at least two on every corner, the one more beautiful than the other. We get a feeling of Istanbul with its mosques, except that when we enter the churches, we see an abundance of icons. Yes, pictures sure are allowed in the Russian Orthodox Church. It reminds us of our stay in Chevetogne, the monastery in Belgium that combines the Roman, Greek and Russian rites. We went there for an interview that Wali

did with one of the monks, not knowing that some years later we would live in the neighborhood!

The monk (a former ballet dancer) told us the Russian church is quite different from the Roman Catholic one. There they want silence as a way to bring the participants to heaven. The Russians work the other way and try to bring heaven with all its beauty on earth. So you bathe you in beauty. Incense for the nose, music for the ears, icons for the eyes. Bathing in so much beauty, you cannot but become cleansed and beautiful yourself. How right he was!



We plan to visit a non-touristic market to buy our favorite souvenirs: utensils and other gear for our Khankah. But first we're in for another detour to satisfy our Sufi touristic feelings: the Russian house of Hazrat Inayat Khan.

### **Inayat Khan in Russia**

Inayat Khan lived in Moscow in 1913/1914. His first daughter Noorunnissa was born in Moscow on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014. She later became a war hero and Nazi victim, working as the sole radio operator in occupied France under her code name 'Madeleine'.

The photos in this part of the newsletter are all from his Moscow residence, a beautiful building in Art Deco style that was finished just a year earlier and offered home to many artists.

Inayat Khan said the Russian spirit fitted his Message best, but the Russian winters were too harsh for his Indian physique.

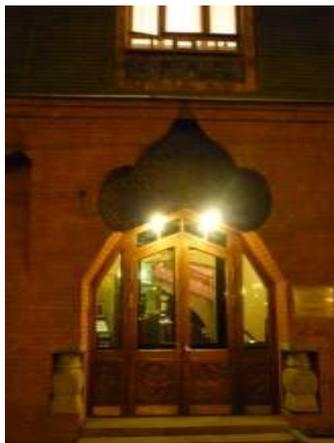
At home we open his autobiography. The first line we read is: 'It was somewhat troublesome for me to stay up all night, and yet it was an opportunity of studying all the different classes of Russia...'

Yes, we know about that! Russian parties go on till morning and during the summer solstice you don't sleep at all. That's the spirit 80 years of Communism have not been able to eradicate!

In Russia Inayat Khan met with the grandson of the great writer Tolstoy and with the composer Skriabin, a composer deeply interested in the spiritual and esoteric side of music. Inayat Khan considered him a mystic.



As not every reader of this newsletter will have access to Inayat Khan's autobiography, here are some more quotes from his time in Russia:



'I was requested to speak on my ideas... At times, when I went a little beyond the boundaries of their religious conventionalities in which they were accustomed to talk, I found them slightly chilled, but I have never seen such comprehensive minds, in which all that is spoken as wisdom and truth so easily finds accommodation. They were interested by the idea, and the only wonder to them was, how could the truth exist in such a perfect form, as I did present, outside their Church, which alone they had so far believed to be the center of all truth? They were wise people, with awakened sympathy, with the love of Christ and appreciation of truth. To me their contact was a wonderful experience...

Among the Russian I found many strict followers of their religion, a thing so little to be found in the more civilized parts of the West. In their churches there is an atmosphere quite like in the temples of India. And yet I found their minds philosophically inclined...

I had become very attached to Russia and its people and but for the climate, which is too cold for one born in tropical lands, I would certainly have decided to settle in Russia for at least some years... I saw in the people of Russia religion, devotion, the idealistic temperament. They are hospitable and affectionate people with a tendency to appreciate and enjoy all beauty, they are gifted in art, inclined to mysticism, seekers of philosophy, ready to become friends and minded to let friendship last.'



### **Three Retreats: England, Tunisia and Russia**

We are looking back upon a very intense, but highly rewarding and attuned period with three Retreats on a row, almost back to back. It was intense, as we each time had to adapt to different groups. At the same time, once you are in retreat mode, you can prolong the experience, so that makes it easier. Also the groups of the different events were most cooperative, as every time the participants in no time merged into one coherent group. Most of them we have known for many years and the ones new to us easily adapt, thus helping us immensely to focus on the work. All through the fall, we are grateful having touched upon the theme of Sufi Psychology, as it broadens our horizon and opens new alleyways for retreats in our perpetual effort to link spirituality with everyday life and to make spirituality accessible and easy to understand for all.

So please find below our first impression of these three fall retreats.

Now we are finally home for our first free weekend in quite some time. Next week we're off to Paris. It'll be our first dancing there, as somehow large capitals don't always are the best environment for the dances, at least in Western Europe.

We are looking forward to France, as we haven't been there in quite some time. This trip will make up for it, as from Paris we move on to the Ardèche and from there to Southern France, where Michel is establishing his new Dance Center at home. All in all two weekends and a full Wednesday of dances with the French dance community. *Merveilleux!*

### **England: Zikr and Zen as food for the Soul**

We're off to England for our annual Sesshin. As we do our Sesshins in silence, we don't expect a large groups. Everyone on the spiritual path knows silence is a balm to the soul and – in combination with the breath – the best way to 'get there' and get into the retreat mode (that is when the real work starts), but being in silence for the best part of three days usually



frightens people as well. Like the previous time, people agree afterwards that indeed the processes that happen when you don't communicate with another have been invaluable and deep. So all would not have missed it for anything in the world.

We owe the Sesshin to Pir Shabda, who started this form of retreat some ten years ago. We did his first ten day Sesshin in California back in 2004. You dance and then sit for 20 or 30 minutes. Dance and sit, dance and sit. That's it. In the sits, the dance goes and the mantra deepens, you pick up the thread from the previous meditation, analyzing

your own behavior and giving yourself a good laugh or just go in deep meditation, rejuvenating and revivifying your soul.

Since 2003 a lot has changed for us. We name the Sesshin 'Zen and Zikr' and tend to work towards full silence during the whole retreat.

On this UK retreat, we are inspired to add a new ingredient to this soul potion. We continue the experiment of the previous sesshin and now give full space to programming the sesshin like a retreat, working with modules like sacred space, the inner judge, forgiving, remembrance and coming into spiritual power along our path.

On top of that, we find quotes from Inayat Khan to guide us into meditation after every dance. It is a lot of work

and actually it keeps us somewhat from getting into retreat mode ourselves, but from the feedback afterwards it's clear that this is a welcome addition. The quotes work for some and did not keep others from their own chosen meditation, but did work like the meditation bell, triggering off the deep silence. This was one of our concerns, as we don't want to lay down the line for all, but rather keep the meditation open and free.

When we go home, we know: this is something to continue and to experiment further with, once our Khankah Samark is established and operational!



## With Rumi in the Sahara



'Yes, we 'd love to come again to the Sahara and lead a group,' we told organizer and co-leader Ahmed Alan Heeks and his partner and organizer Walia, 'but only if we all agree the Sahara is the only real teacher.' A needless question, as Ahmed knows the Desert better than we do, or many in the West for that matter, and we know this question is expressing his approach too. We asked it to confirm our own mission statement for this pilgrimage into the Tunisian Desert, traveling with 26 of us Westerners with 9 Bedouin and 20 camels into the

Desert for a Retreat in one of her now abandoned Oasis. For us personally this is not only a wonderful reunion with one of the most powerful places we've ever been. It is also a chance to deepen our relationship with the Sahara.

The culture shock from the previous time is no longer there. We are prepared and know all our concepts will be shaken, our foundations proven one-sided and not valid here. Now we can enjoy the ever changing landscape of sand. Just being there.

The desert is never the same, yet always sand. Dunes move, but stay dunes. It is this landscape that gave rise to monotheism, to Unity behind all apparent diversity, to the sense that there is one Power so mighty that we are but grains of sand, dust, in the hands of this power.



Rumi uses the metaphor of the polo ball, which has no will to go anywhere, but has to wait for the stick to direct it, but such sophisticated cultural city metaphors aren't needed here.



Sand is enough to make us realize how tiny we are. A caravan ten times as big as ours would have vanished in the vastness of the sand.

No concepts? The Sahara this time has another surprise for all of us all, Ahmed and Walia included: rain. It rains through the whole first night, as if the Sahara wants to baptize us. Most of us don't sleep a wink and we all come to breakfast wet. And in good spirit, for isn't it a cosmic joke to go the Sahara and be welcomed with rain, the longest and wettest one ever in eleven years of Desert trips?

This is an ideal environment to work with the Self. We use Rumi's famous poem '*I died as a mineral to become a plant*' to make contact with our mineral self with its backbone support and also its principles, written in stone, that keep us from moving; our vegetable self with its ability to digest all that we experience and its need to take time out, but also its laziness, keeping us also from being on the move and discovering new horizons; our animal self that protects us from danger, but always wants to sit on the driver's seat; the Mystery in us that makes the 'I' and 'mine' with all its pros and cons; and the human self that hungers and thirsts for refinement and being perfected, so we can become an image of the One and express God on Earth; and deeper into the Mystery into the Secret Self and the Secret of Secrets, closer to God with every step.

The Desert does not give us much time to introduce the themes, but all the more to digest it, as we walk, sit on a dune top, wander around, share or find another way to work with our inner selves.

We are with 26 and 6 different nations, ranging from Australia to Russia, and of all ages, ranging from 13 through early 30 to well into the age of 70+, but already soon form a tight group. Many are new to the Desert; some are new to Sufism and some new to the dances, but all embrace the might of the Sahara, her teachings and the teachings of the retreat.

All join the morning practices and ask for more of them. That's difficult in the beginning, as the flies on our faces prevent us from going into deeper silence, no matter how experienced some of us are as practitioners. Later in the week the coolness of the morning keeps the flies away we can prolong the meditation in between the chanting and reciting.



The same is true for the dancing. Ahmed is thrilled that we brought our sturdy old 12-string Ibanez. It's the first time a twelve string has sounded on these trips, he declares. The guitar survives without a crack and is renamed 'Sandy'.

Halfway our stay in the oasis Wainatraj many go on a solo retreat, finding a spot in a nearby oasis to spend one or two nights alone. About half of the group stays in the oasis for a similar retreat in silence, but with joined meals. The Bedouin don't do their usual evening program of singing, drumming and storytelling with lots of sweet green tea as *schnapps* or energizer. For

this night we get our energy solely from inside!

And so we all deepen our desert experience. The next morning we welcome the solo-retreaters. Most enter the communal space in silence and find a corner to sit alone and slowly

get into the routine of being together. Yes, it has been a wonderful experience and one that cannot easily be done anywhere else.

The first sharing after the solo-retreat is wonderful. All open up and share even more intimate feelings and thoughts. We all realize we are making both an individual journey as a person and a group journey. All experiences are unique, yet all are recognizable by everyone, as we all are in the same caravan.

As this is in the deepest sense true of 'normal life' as well, it makes you wonder what we have lost on our way into becoming more and more 'civilized'.

More food to ponder upon.

Yes, the Sahara is a great teacher, a wonderful metaphor and a unique place in this earth. How grateful we are to have been enabled to come here once more. Now the pilgrimage is over and we all get into the bus that will take us to Douz for our first shower in 10 days and a real cup of coffee. The desert is great, but so is being able to take a shower or drink some genuine coffee!

Then on we go, to Djerba for a last relaxed day. We planned to stay a bit longer to have a holiday.

When we finally are due to the airport in Tunis, we decide to go the local way and take the bus. We are the only Westerners in the bus and the trip is probably the cheapest and best way to get to know some of Tunisia and its inhabitants. We share food and talk to the people (most speak French), chatter with the children and laugh with a young girl who proudly recites the Fatiha as a nursery rhyme.

Some 40 kilometers from Tunis, the landscape changes and soon we see only cars, buildings and people. Our hearts ache and long for the silence, the openness and the vastness of the Desert.

And we know: we don't only want to come back, we need to.

### **Russia: going residential**



'What a wonderful way to live together,' sighed someone. 'When I go to the bathroom, one person is waiting while reading Inayat Khan and in the shower someone else is singing the Gayatri Mantra.'

This is our third retreat on a row, after the Sesshin in England, all in silent, and the Tunisian Sahara with one silent day. So no wonder one woman – who also did the Desert pilgrimage and knows our way of working at the Winter Retreat with its one-day-sesshin, asks for a silent day. With one day to go, we decide to drop the original program and include an afternoon Sesshin to deepen the experience.

That evening we break the silence, as it is the last evening, so we need some celebration to group the whole event and experience.

After the dances a spontaneous and unplanned sing-along emerges. Woody Guthry's children songs come from the back of our memory and suddenly we all sing: '*Let me ride in your car, car*' and '*I want to sit in the front seat, back seat, front seat*'. When we explain that Guthry is teaching the children about the *nafs* with this song, all roar with laughter. Yes, we know about the *nafs* and its urge to sit in the front seat! After all, this was woven into the Zikr theme of the retreat, our first residential one in 11 years Russia. How can you talk about anything in Sufism without including the *nafs*?

At the end, all agree this is something to continue. One woman confesses she now for the first time understands the dances are more than recreational and indeed part of a spiritual path.

We're at a beautiful Buddhist monastery and retreat center, comfortably between St. Petersburg and Moscow. Good rooms with plenty of space, simple, but great tasting food and a nice dance room, just right for the odd 30 co-travelers on this journey. To the delight of all, two Westerners have joined us. Arjuna has been on the Crimea Camp before, so knows some of

the participants, his partner Dagmar is new to it all and at the end explains how wonderful it is to be surrounded by so many open hearts. She spontaneously gets her 'Russian initiation', standing in the middle with eyes closed and being rocked and moved to and fro by all, while all sing a Russian song about the Sun of Love.

For this retreat we embark on the theme of Zikr, the Art of Remembrance. Another première for us, as we never spent a whole retreat on the Art of Remembrance. Our model is simple: we follow the Islamic creed( the *zikr* phrase), saying *no god but God* and treat the first negation (the so-called *fana* part) as an invitation to work with our lower self and the second part (the so-called *baka* part) to come into the deep power of our true self. So in the end *zikr* is a way to elevate the soul from the lower self level to the higher self level.

As this is mainly a dance retreat, we don't go all the way into different zikr practices, but mainly use the dances as our practices into *zikr*. In our hearts we feel the urge and need to do this again as a Sufi Retreat, taking more time for the actual sitting practices and the different forms of *zikr*.

We start explaining that any dance can be a zikr, depending on the way the leader treats the dance. We are consistent and not only dance from the Sufi tradition, but also zikr with Shiva, go into *fana* with Radha's love for Govinda and break through with the Aramaic Jesus.

But first things first. We stay in *fana* for the first day-and-a-half, trying to make contact with our ego self, the animal self or *nafs ammara*, the unconscious mechanism behind much of our behavior, and thus try to understand how our inner navigator normally works. Everyone is moved when we quote Inayat Khan on how he surrendered to the cause and is in awe hearing how strong his power was to continue spreading the Message.

Then we try to create space by reprogramming ourselves so our deeper wishes and longing for a life, dedicated more to the divine, can breathe and be the core of our decision making and of our whole behavior.

In the afternoons we do the walks, first in the footsteps and then guiding and following. The last brings us into a sharing of the role models we have of leadership. We soon learn to see it as yet another strand of our unconscious programming that needs to be looked at. Russia has had over 300 years of harsh leadership and the days aren't over yet, but that's not a reason for believing any leaders should be strong and harsh, isn't it? Easily said, but reprogramming that one is tough, as the old role models almost run into the genes, passed on as they are by so many generations.

Finally we enter the second part of the Islamic Creed, the *baka* or self-realization. The dances bring us into our divine power and we all know this is real, not another trick of the ego to take over.

At the end all eyes go around the circle, looking at each other's eyes and seeing how much has changed in five days. We're all 'cooked', as Rumi would say. Retreats like this are a pressure cooker for the soul and we all know this isn't the end of the process. Once home, we'll have a lot of things to digest. But the most important thing is: don't forget to remember!

## Epilogue

Heading for the airport, we find another metaphor for the *nafs*: Moscow traffic.

Following official rules is obviously for sissies and gets you nowhere. What works is being competitive and aggressive. You take as much space as you can get, give as little as possible. Every centimeter gained is a step forward, so all cars push themselves in and completely block all traffic on crossroads and major junctions. When you need to go left, but you see space on the right, just take it, as in the end you can always diagonally go across the four lanes, even when they are used as six lanes. Or is it seven?

Our chauffeur Marina proudly points to her steering wheel. 'Twelve years!' The car or her being a taxi driver? We don't know, but somehow we feel safe. With reason: we get to the airport in one hour, half the time normally needed and without a scratch on car or us.