

Report Estonian Winter retreat 2nd year

January 26th – February 2nd 2002



This retreat was the second of a proposed series of three. We envision that the three Dance trainings in total will offer the necessary background and experience comparable with an ordinary year round training in two or three years of four weekends a year.

We were grateful to see that many people from last year also were present this year. Not only do we see this as a sign of their appreciation, it also enabled us to continue we left the retreat last year. On top of that it does

offer those attendants the full scope.

Central this year was the Unity of Religious Ideals, thus combining the thirst for Sufism in these regions with the necessity to give trainees some depth in the current religions. Rather than giving lectures on these traditions, we chose in our afternoon class to focus on some central theme's that can easily be translated to every day life and 'ring a bell' with the participants on an experiential level. We chose for theme's that are living inside us, so we didn't need to in depth study or prepare the classes, but could work on the spur of the moment. Some themes, like the support one can feel from a sangha, the notion that we cannot ignore our darker shadow side seem to stuck immediately and, once introduced, stayed more or less with us the rest of the week. Other themes like the three C's (thank you Saadi for bringing them into our lives) summed up a lot of what had been said before. All in all for us the idea of a Unity behind all religious Ideals became a living experience.

Timetable

Timetables are difficult. You need one as it give s the week a rhythm and therefore helps to keep the group grounded. On the other hand a timetable is there to help us and shouldn't rule over us. As we found last year's model to be successful, we more or less followed the same timetable. Again we experienced this timetable for this retreat to be flowing and flexible and not forcing for the participants. We hardly had to practice Wali Ali's adagio: 'I don't mind if you come late, as long as you don't mind me starting on time.'

7.30 –8:45 Morning Zikhr (optional)

Starting with the Mullah Cycle, we soon dropped some of the parts, giving space to breath and sound practices and working more and more with silence as the week progressed. We mainly worked with basic wazifa's as rahman – rahim, bismillah, Allah (of course) and the like and combined sung zikhr with guitar with the half spoken –half sung form. Also we invited the participants into practice of *intention* (in the Jewish *kavanah* meaning of the word), which seemed to have a good effect.



9.00 –10.00

Breakfast

10.00 – 10.30 Pow Wow

We used this time for practical information, sharing, questions and the like. Again we experienced this as time well spent, creating a community feeling (*sanga*). On the day of the Islam (Thursday) the hour was spent on one question, concerning September 11th and the role of Islam. Most cases we started with a mantra of bhadjan like chant or a story after which we read The Bowl of Saki with comments by SAM.

10.30 – 11.00 Creating the morning program

The Pow Wow emerged in a group process of creating the morning program. The emerging teachers were invited to shortly tell about the intention, atmosphere, element etc. of the Dance, after which we decided as a group the order. This took much time the first few times, but went rapidly faster as experience grew. We have used this format in Holland with success for three years and introduced it in this group as the main questions of our Russian students were on 'creating a program'. As this naturally followed the pow wow, the whole group participated, not just the teachers.

11.00 – 12.00 Dance session emerging teachers

The teachers were asked to choose foundation Dances from the religion that was focus for that day. As we had the 101 Manual with us, many of these Dances were checked against 'the bible' as this manual soon was nicknamed. Teachers were Helena, Shahodat and Marina (Russia), Valentina and Fatima (Latvia). For these – in our experience excellent – sessions usually the whole group stayed.

12.00 – 13.00 Teachers feedback



Like last year we gave feedback on the sessions, using our comments to further steer the teachers on a personal level and to enter broader subjects and background of the Dances for all involved (how to start, entering the atmosphere of the Dance before explaining it, how to work in the middle part, how to end etc.) and sometimes also the some of the philosophy behind the Dances. This time the whole group stayed to listen and sometimes participate in the discussions that followed. Maybe the group process of creating the program added to this, maybe (we may hope) the quality of what was offered was another reason to stay.

13.00 – 15.30 Lunch and free time

15.30 – 17.30 Class on Unity of religious Ideals

In this class (basically a sort of *dharma* talk) we focused on one tradition per day, entering one or more themes that are close to every day life's experience and relevant for the Dances. Stories, a fitting Dance – explained on a more esoteric level – and sometimes walks were used to embody the spoken word. As in St. Petersburg we emphasized that these themes were models of the truth, not Truth itself.

As the reader can see, many of the themes are interlinked and were with us for more than one day. The theme of darkness (our shadow) as a guide and ultimate source of creativity rang out the first days, from Creation Spirituality to Buddhism.

Sunday: Christianity: the four paths of Meister Eckhardt/M. Fox, leading into an explanation of the Lord's Prayer from this point of view.

- Monday:* Nature & Goddess tradition: maiden-mother-crone connected with rebirth. From the Mother Earth Goddess we learn that all creativity is born out of darkness (Path two).
- Tuesday* Hinduism. Trimurti: some are better in beginning, some in sustaining, and some in ending for a new beginning. Both Rama and Krishna are avatars of the Vishnu principle, so both are valid. Mastery is knowing who to tune in to.
- Wednesday* Buddhism. The three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), interbeing (a term of Thich Nhat Hanh, all is connected, the *ho mi taki asin* from the native Americans), the bodhisatva, Zen stories, influence of Zen on SAM and the Dances.
- Thursday* Islam. Surrendering. Nafs (Nasrudin's donkey). The three C's of Joe Miller (no Concepts, no Comparison, no Complaint). Muhammad as the seal of the Prophets. Here we also did a short series of SAM Dances.
- Friday* Judaism. Bereshit mysticism, going back to the Beginning (Born in blessing), knowing when to stop (Sabbath) The walk of Mozes.

18.00 – 20.00 *Dinner and free time*

20.00 – 22.00 *Evening session of Dances*

We mostly led the evenings with Silje, Glenda and sometimes also one of the students, helping us on one or more Dances. The Saturday was a common introductory evening, in the round of names we asked the people to say with what intention they had come. Sunday followed with the Lord's Prayer. We took a risk by starting with such a strong cycle, but it proved worth for it set the tone for the rest of the week. On Thursday Shahodat & Yura led us into the DHO healing ritual, after which we offered the healing Dance and a zikr type evening. On Friday we halfway led the group into a Sabbath inspired meditation going back day by day to Saturday and then bringing our original *kavana* (intention) for the week into every day back to the here and now. The evening ended with a joyful Sabbath-like celebration with songs, a little soft fruit wine, jokes and stories. It proved the perfect grounding experience for this retreat. Our Saturday morning practice was kharma yoga (packing, cleaning up) after which we led the group in some requested Dances, ending with expressing our gratitude to SAM in the Kalama.

MAIN FOCUS

1. Dancing and daily life

Like last year we gratefully exploited the venue with its separated Dance room and kitchen/dining room as symbols of the world of 'being attuned' and 'every day life' merging into one another as different, but equally valid ways of tuning to the divine and 'bringing *bismillah* into daily life'.

2. Humour & storytelling

Nasrudin, Zen stories Chassidic tales and other stories were an integral part of the classes, but also of the feedback sessions and the pow wow. We trust the stories will do their work as teachers in proper time. The stories also enabled us to show how to adapt and change your state in the spur of a moment. As we emphasized last year: the divine is everywhere and can be experienced through silence, through practices, through Dances, music and poetry, but also through stories, laughter and joy.

3. Attuning to the archetypes

As we had hoped for, the attunement of every day with its focus on a particular religion was very noticeable in the whole group. We had a more joyful Hindu day, a more

serious Buddhist day and the Jewish tradition proved to be most grounding. We are grateful that inspiration provided us with this order. We harvested much of this attunement on the last full day in the tassawuri of Mozes.

4. Singing

More that last year and enthused by our experience at the Latvian Camp (Summer 2001) we often used a song (bhadjan-type or mantra) to introduce the tradition before pow wow started. At the Hindu evening Trevor & Glenda also led us into a short bhadjan session.

5. The Bowl of Saki

Every morning after the singing we in pow wow read the Bowl of Saki with SAM's comment. We wanted to in order to have the attunement two these two ancestors. The bowl proved to be a wonderful guide, SAM's teachings needed some explaining, so we ended up with a daily little Sufi class in pow wow.

THE GROUP

1. Numbers and nationalities

Present were 13 persons from Estonia, 8 from Latvia, 4 from Russia, two from England and of course us two from Holland. About one third of them is certified or in mentorship and training to become a Dance teacher. All were happy to welcome more Russian teachers this time, as they added to the atmosphere. We were happy to notice that many of participants also were present last year. This means this formula does work.

We were sorry to miss people from Lithuania. We heard from our friends some may come to the Latvian camp. We hope to further integrate this summer so this country also can benefit from the process of merging neighboring countries and cultures and Dance circles and learning from each other.

2. Language

We used Russian translation as our *lingua franca*, as this language still binds these countries. This time we address the language issue more explicitly and apologized for not translating into the language of the country (Estonian). And yes, we did learn our first Estonian words.

3. Background

Most of the Baltic participants have been dancing and studying Sufism for a number of years with James Burgess and/or us, and are experienced dancers. Many of them of course also followed the weekends with Saadi and/or Tansen.

On one level the work we do is also to empower the local teacher (Silje) and we're grateful that some dancers from earlier times (who danced with Maris, now living in Scotland) after this retreat want to join her circle.

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.



GENERAL COMMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

We feel this retreat served its goal as the second year of a three-year training program. By linking it to a Sufi theme (Unity of religious Ideals) 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 daily focus and rhythm and enabled us at the same time to work freely around the themes.

For next year the (emerging) teachers asked us to go deeper into SAM's Dances. We would like to broaden this theme and emphasize indeed on SAM, but also on HIK and other influences (Ruth St. Denis, SAM's Zen background) and on the early and foundation Dances. We will talk about this at more length when we visit Tallinn in April.

In general the participants feel this week as a 'Baltic winter Camp' – in Estonia it actually is announced as such. The experience of an indoor camp in no way hinders the training focus of it, as the four walls and the stillness of the winter snow keep us as a group and on an individual level more inward than a Dance camp normally can cater for.



In a broader picture this means all is nicely balanced: Estonia offers the Baltic Winter Camp and Latvia the Baltic Summer Camp. As we feel one of our students is ready for it, we invited her as a teacher for the Latvian Camp to further enhance integration of the Dance circles in this part of the world. Also it enables the camp to broaden the range of teachers without adding too much to the costs. In the end we feel this to be the reality of all camps: enough 'local' teachers to support and carry the camp with some international teachers to add the cream and possibly guide or steer the camp process and the less experienced teachers.

Februari 2002, Ariënne & Wali van der Zwan

PARTICIPANTS FEEDBACK

Helena (St. Petersburg):

Dear Wali and Ariënne, Thank you very much for this retreat. I felt myself much more grounded after retreat than before.

I prepared my report for Narayan. The most important experience of this retreat was the experience of community, family, how we can love each other and be open for all and feel compassion to all human beings. It was traveling through several traditions: Christianity, Hindu, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrism, Judaism and Native traditions.

Every day was devoted to one tradition, using different languages and mantras we found joy in unity. For me very special were dances of Sam.

The last tradition was Judaism and we celebrated Shabbat sharing wine and sweets, there were Russian, English, Estonian and Latvian songs. It was unforgettable! The atmosphere of the retreat was deep and joyful at the same time. I am very thankful to Wali and Ariënne and also to Oneness Project for the opportunity for teachers to come.

Love, Helena

Marina Ivanova (Russia):

I am very thankful to Wali, Ariënne, all organizers of the seminar for opportunity to take part in it. It was very deep and strong seminar, I think it gave all of us very much. Wali and Ariënne could create and keep on holding real atmosphere of spirit of Dances. Their attitude to dances and preparing to discuss them is perfect example for me real service of them not a work. For me it was a good experience to feel group, even commonwealth of people, mutual work, mutual meals, communication, in a word: "eat, dance and pray together". Our morning dances were very important issue for me; it was real school for young leaders, support of the group and almost parental care of Wali and Ariënne. For me personally it was not easy but rather difficult although very important and actual merge into dances and myself.

Shahodat (Russia):

Dear Wali and Arienne, I am still living under impression of the retreat. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be there and participate in it. I liked the atmosphere it was light and joyful.

I had a discovery for myself it looks as I became to sense deeper dances. For me it was important to work over focus and concentration during leading the dance. I try to keep on using it. It was so good that we were 4 from St Petersburg that we could see each other better and I could open some qualities in the people which I did not have.

I am very thankful to Oneness Project for opportunity to meet my mentors in Tallinn. It was very important and necessary for me.

Love, Shahodat

Fatima (Latvia):

Dear Wali and Ariënne, As to my impression of winter retreat, it was very useful to meet mentors and study group`s colleagues. Retreat was given the possibility to look deeper in self as the dance leader, there was good steady process. At this days I understand a lot of dances energy on the levels of feeling and main. After the retreat I started to play with guitar. For me it's the great progress. Also on the retreat I learned some new (for me) dances from different traditions. In generally it was very great idea about unity of all religions traditions. In generally I would like to repeat this experiment. But only I had very strange feeling as on the retreat there is a little bit too of energy of earth for me. And I thank you very much for money support of this retreat.

Love, Fatima

From Silje (Estonia):

We were very happy here in Estonia, that again we had a possibility to organize the winter Dance retreat. Again the Dance lovers from different countries were gathering together in a cold and snowy Estonian winter.

Our diverse international community (people from Russia, Latvia, U.K., Holland and Estonia) had possibility to be every day in Unity through the different traditions.

It was very special for us to be and to dance one day together like the Christians, next day like the Great Goddesses, then like the Native Americans, next day like the Hindus, next - the Buddhists, then like the Sufis and finally as the Jews.



Thank to Wali and Ariënne's special classes dedicated for every tradition we could deeper feel and understand those traditions.

We had wonderful Dances of Universal Peace training sessions with less experienced Dance leaders, which were followed by teachers' feedback. All participants of our retreat showed a great interest in the feedback sessions. And also it was very interesting, that everyone could take part in making of the order for the Dance sessions. Everyone could think about it and express her (his) opinion. I suppose and hope that some persons, who had not tried to lead (or had not even thought about it before), received an inspiration and courage for further.

I am very grateful to Ariënne and Wali, that they not only asked me to play the guitar together with Wali (which by itself of course was again a great learning process for me), but also trusted me to lead some Dances in their sessions. It was very special and useful to lead together sessions with much more experienced teaches and to feel the inner atmosphere of their Dance leading. For me it was the blessing and the challenge at the same time.

Some people, who didn't decide yet to lead the Dances, had possibility to be in the center of the circle with some musical instrument (most of all the drum) in their hands. Maybe it could be the first step for them towards the Dance leading. Also for those, who have had more experienced in guitar playing or in drumming, found a lot in playing together with the other musicians and under the Wali's leading and helpful recommendations. It gave lots of new ideas how to do it better and differently.

As many dancers were the same as last year, we had not need to explain many things. And it allowed us easier through the eating, dancing and praying together made our community really in love, harmony and beauty.

The days at the retreat went very quickly and again we had to say good-bye to each other. But we hope and try to hold this sacred loving atmosphere of the Dance week in our hearts and carry this atmosphere to our Dance circles and to our lives.

One participant said a week later, that she feel herself more self-assurance, decidedness and full of energy.

Thanks to the teachers! Thanks to the One! Thanks to the Oneness!

Love,
Silje and Estonian Dance circle