

Abraham and Halima's Visit to Oz



by Arjuna

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The recent visit to Oz by Abraham and Halima proved a wonderful success and brought healing to the community. It was their first visit to Australia. They had been the teachers at Mana in NZ a few years ago, which is when I first connected with them. I was immediately taken by their presence and their way of presenting the dances and the Sufi practices. There was a sense of deep connection to this lineage, which had been built up over 40 years of dance leading and Sufi practices. Abraham, like Shabda and Wali Ali were original mureeds of Murshid Sam. They all carry a direct transmission from Murshid Sam. This was a time when the dances and the Sufi practices were not separate as they later became. However now the

dances have returned to the Sufi Ruhaniat International (<http://ruhaniat.org/>) and been restored as genuine Sufi practices. From their website: ‘The Sufi Ruhaniat International was founded by Murshid Samuel L. Lewis shortly before he died in 1971. We are in the stream of the ages-old wisdom lineage of Sufism brought to the West in 1910 by Hazrat Inayat Khan under the title "The Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty” and his disciple Murshid Samuel L. Lewis (Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti).’

For me the dances have been a vital form of spiritual practice, ever since I discovered them. During my Zen days in the 80s, we used to recite Hakuin Zenji’s Song of Zazen as part of our Sesshin. In this wonderful poem there is a line that says: ‘ With Mind, that is No Mind; Singing and Dancing are the voice of the law.’ I was always struck by those lines each time we recited them. In the Zen tradition the singing and dancing was an internal experience until I met Thich Nhat Hanh. Back in 1986, in the International year of Peace, as a member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship I sponsored him to come to Australia, in conjunction with the Vietnamese Community. As part of his one-week retreat at Buradoo, in the Southern Highlands of NSW, we had a creative presentation session each afternoon when singing, dancing, poetry, stories and drama presentations were encouraged. It was such a rich experience of our creativity. Thich Nhat Hanh himself is a poet, as well as a Zen master and peace activist.

When I discovered the dances a decade or so later, I realised that these lines could come to life through the inspiration of Murshid Sam, who was also a Zen Master. After meeting Abraham and Halima in NZ, Karen and I then took the opportunity to visit them in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when they were doing a 1 day Dance Sesshin. It was a form that Murshida Mariam Baker had introduced to Oz and then Pir Shabda and Murshid Allaudin turned up and also led a Dance Sesshin with us. Given my years of experience of Zen practice, it was a form that I really resonated with.



It was during that visit to Cambridge that I invited Abraham and Halima to come this year. So for me this visit was several years in the making. Consequently I've been really delighted by the success of the visit. On the Easter weekend we had the retreat in Sydney at the Miroma Steiner Centre in Vacluse. On both days we had some 40

people attend, some came for both days and some came for 1 day. Then at the 1-week retreat at the Brahma Kumaris Centre at Wilton we had some 33 people overall including Abraham and Halima. 27 of those people attended the entire retreat. It was a good number for the retreat as it allowed a level of intimacy to develop. It also worked well as Abraham and Halima were keen to get know all the retreatants personally. They created a sense of community that ventured towards communion by the end of the retreat.



My experience of the retreat was that there was a strong heart focus. We did the dances for a considerable amount of time, which allowed them to deepen. We began each day with Sufi practices, which the majority of the retreatants attended. This also helped to deepen our experience. In the afternoons we had local leaders in groups of 4 or 5 leading sessions, which Abraham and Halima also attended. There

were 2 nights of Zikr dances that they led and 1 of Indigenous dances that Zeb, Karen and I led. We danced outside on the grass, spent time one afternoon working with clay, which Karen directed, and we collectively participated in a walk in the Labyrinth that Cedar had created.



There were times for walking in the garden and in the bush that adjoined the centre. The motel style rooms, with ensuite bathroom facilities were quite luxurious compared to many retreat centres we'd been to. The vegetarian food was OK for most, but not for all of us. However we generally felt very welcomed by the BKs who maintain this very beautiful rural retreat centre.



For me, I came away with such a sense of love for our Australian dance family. I feel we are a very special group of people, who are truly emanating a vibration of peace through the dances. It was Murshid Sam's vision that the dances would create more peace in the world as we come together to Eat, Dance and Prayer. It was also his vision that the dances would one day spread around the world. This has certainly happened with the dances now being in over 30 countries, in both hemispheres. Abraham was particularly struck by how this retreat, along with his recent retreats in Russia and Ecuador were manifesting Mushid Sam's vision.



One of Freya's beautiful art works!