

Some Reflections and Notes on Pir Shabda's Visit

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by Arjuna

“The root motivation is the pathway to awakening”
Pir Shabda



Above all it is the teaching on ‘breath’ that I came away with from Shabda’s retreats - as well as the importance of music in the dances. I have heard from a number of dance leaders over the years that Murshid Sam’s dance melodies were often quite simple, with just 2 notes at times. For Murshid Sam, the dances were spiritual practice. This was also a teaching I got from Shabda. However, Hazrat Inayat Khan was a highly accomplished musician and singer as well as a Sufi teacher. It was through his music that he was blessed to

harmonise East and West, according to his own teacher, Abu Hashim Madani. However the lack of understanding of Indian classical music in the West in the early 20th century, made this difficult.

It took around 60 years before the Dances of Universal Peace could come along through Murshid Sam and East, West and Indigenous could be harmonised through the music of the dances. These retreats with Shabda, himself a master musician and classical Indian singer, really brought that home to me. The dances are an example of a truly universal Sufi practice. With senior Sufi teachers in the Ruhaniat and dance leaders, like Shabda, and others who have come to Australia over the years, like Abraham and Halima, Allaudin, Mariam Baker, Wali and Arrienne and Anahata, we have been privileged to receive some profound teachings that have raised the level of understanding of the Ruhaniat here.

On the weekend Shabda focussed on the Mystic Roots of the Dances of Universal Peace. He told some great stories and shared some of his experiences with Murshid Sam, as he is one of the few leaders alive today to have had a direct contact with Murshid Sam. The root motivation of the dances and these practices are a pathway to awakening. As he said: "Every action ever taken by everything everywhere was for this." A quote by Al-Ghazzali. "It's like shooting an arrow at a target you can't see!" Shabda comments on this what are we connecting to? ONENESS!



One of his quotes, originally from Al Gazzali and often quoted by Murshid Sam himself, is that “Sufism is based on experience not on form.” The dances are a vehicle for the path of spiritual freedom, of kindness and of compassion.

The purpose of life is to awaken to our true nature, everything is thirsty and searching for that. For this he gave a 9-point plan that was expanded to 11 points from strength and courage to flexibility. Everything that is arising is arising as your teacher, are further teachings I came away with. Another teaching was that the dances are a gift to humanity to create friendship and community. There is a teaching from Inayat where he said; in this world the will is very operative, but after leaving the body, (in what the Tibetans call the Bardo) the imagination is more operative. Shabda’s profound mantra is: “This is how it is right now!”

Listen to the sound files from the weekend, these teachings are there in much greater depth. As well you can hear the Sufi choir singing an Easter Song in Latin ‘Surrexit Christus Hodie’. Here Shabda’s skills as a choir director came to the fore.



On the weekend there was much joyous dancing and singing. We learnt many new dances as well as revisiting some of my old favourites like the Andalucian Zikr.



Then after the Easter Weekend we went to the 5-day retreat at Mulgoa. Here the theme was: Cultivating the Inner Life, Harmony with the Outer Life, Growing the Seeds of Motivation, Strength, Compassion and Ease. As co-author of *Physicians of the Heart*, Pir Shabda shared teachings from his book on the science and art of wazifa and zikr, the breath, the Walking Meditations and Dances of Universal Peace originated by Murshid Samuel Lewis and spiritual and personal stories that liberate the heart.

Once again listen to the sound files where all these teachings were recorded day by day. It began with teachings on mysticism as the flowering of the heart, the inherent potential of every living thing. It is the essence of us that we are looking for. Sufism is a means – God is awakening in us, Shabda quoted Rumi several times “empty yourself of yourself, be like melting snow, wash yourself of yourself.” Mysticism, sound and breath are the 3 bases of our school.

He spoke of the letters that Murshid (HIK) wrote to Rabia Martin as essential teachings. You can download these from the website.



There were many teachings on the breath. The core of practice is to live in the breath – a rhythmic breath – “each breath I take is in thy grace.” Place a sacred phrase on your breath lightly. This is the *Fikr* swing your breath in and out!

To the count of 4!

TOWARD THE ONE + 1

The breath is life. Watch your breath day and night, this is the root core of our lineage. In breath resides all the mystery there is. We experimented with the effect of emotions on and thoughts on the breath. If you want guidance, you get it on the out breath – if you want vitality, you get it in the in breath.



We had lessons on ragas, on forgiveness, on Buddhist teachings, on deconstructing the adaptive notion of a 'separate' self, on making a God ideal, on non-duality, on death, on love – “whose idea was this to make the lover so visible and the beloved so invisible” again a quote from Rumi.

We had a creative afternoon with Karen and Cedar making colourful hearts:



And an afternoon led by two upcoming Australian dance leaders
Bronnie and Heidi:



On the Friday we had a Sufi Sesshin, one of Shabda's inventions. As Shabda explained the dances are great at embodying joy and community, but not so good on the silent practice. For this sitting Zen meditation was introduced, as Murshid Sam was also a Zen master. He had great teachers in Nyogen Zenzaki, D.T. Suzuki and Sokei-an-Sasaki. It was a beautiful way of receiving the teachings from the inside out. The Sufi Sesshin is a very integrative practice by allowing us to enter into the emptiness of the meditation and then flow into the form of the dances. Thus we are embodying the teachings of the Heart Sutra that "form is emptiness and emptiness is form."



On the weekend we had a focus on the Physicians of the Heart and the beautiful names. Again listen to the sound files for the weekend for details. He explained how the names had been grouped, how they complimented each other or how they could be used to balance opposing qualities.



Overall Shabda was drawing attention to our desire to awaken. If we are not here to wake up, what are we here for? I came away with the teaching that self-realisation is the real purpose of life and if that's the case then everything we do has to focus on this purpose.



A poem of reflection on Shabda's teachings

the dances
a practice of peace
a practice of self-realisation
a practice of harmony
and connection
a practice of affection
through music
vibration song dance
and mantra
we make peace
through the vibrations
of ancient mantras
Om Shanti Om
La Ellaha El Allah Hu
Om Mane Padme Hum
Shalom Salaam
Kyrie Eleison -
we pray
and sway
we turn
and return

Om Nama Shivaya
the Lord of the dance
Nataraj



dissolves into the Buddha
who is no other than the Christ
or Krishna, Rama, Tara, Kwan Yin –
Great Beings of the Universe
Teachers of humanity
Moses, Mohammed
Rumi, Rabia
Hafiz and Inayat Khan
Ruth St Denis
taught Murshid Sam
to take the dances
out of the ether –
and today our mentors
and teachers
share these delights
with love



On the last morning, we began outside with 2 Aboriginal dances. One from Bunjalung country gifted to Zebunissa and one gifted to us by Uncle Noel Butler of the Budawang Nation near Ulladulla



There was also a tribute to Zahira for her 90th birthday. Here's her centrepiece made by Robyn along with the colourful hearts:

