

Pir Shabda Retreat 2017: Cultivating the Inner Life , Harmonising with the Outer life

Pir Shabda Khan's recent visit to our annual DOUPA retreat graced us with inspiring spiritual teachings, masterful bazouki playing and wonderful dances. Ecstasy and awe were in plentitude. What remained were many tantalising moments of awakening to our true inheritance, our Divine Beauty, and to what is real in our lives.

Youth Scholarship

Pir Shabda, being a practical spiritual teacher, also created a vision for what could be in the future. During the weekend at Miroma Prep Centre in Vaucluse, which was well attended by over 40 people, Pir Shabda raised the question of what are we doing about the youth and their involvement in the Dances. Being a man of action, we did a fundraiser on the spot and raised nearly a \$1000 towards the youth scholarship. **You can donate to DOUPA Inc, BSB 112-879, account 466 653 716.** As a way forward, this fund will enable younger folk (most of us are in the 50's plus club!) to attend various retreats and be an encouragement to further explore the path of the Dances. It will take some time, but it is a start.

Bird Stories

The Sufi story of the king's parrot in the Golden Cage, who yearns to be shown the way to freedom, became a metaphor for the retreat...an apt one at that since Pir Shabda is an avid bird watcher:

One day the king was about to go into the forest where the parrot came from, and he said to it, 'My pet, I have loved you, and kept you with all the care and attention and fondness that I could; and I should like very much to take any message you wish to your brothers in the forest'. The parrot said, 'How kind of you to have offered to do this for me. Convey to my brothers in the jungle that the king and queen have done their very best to make me happy, a golden cage, all kinds of fruits, and nice things of all sorts; and they love me so much. But in spite of all the attention they give me I long for the forest, and the desire to dwell among you, free as I used to be before, always possesses my mind. But I see no way out of it, so pray send me your goodwill and your love. One only lives in hope. Perhaps some day my wish will be granted.' The king went into the forest, and approached the tree from which the parrot was taken and said to the brothers of the parrot, 'O parrots, there is one whom I have taken from among you to my palace; and I am very fond of him, and he receives all the attention I can give. This is your brother's message.' They listened to the message very attentively, and one after the other dropped to the ground and seemed dead.

The king was depressed beyond measure. Spellbound, he could not understand what it was that he had said that should have affected the feelings of those parrots so much. The loving parrots could not bear his message. And he thought, 'What a sin I have committed, to have destroyed so many lives'. He returned to his palace, and went to his parrot, and said, 'How foolish, O parrot, to give me such a message that as soon as your brothers heard it, one after another they dropped down, and all lay dead before me'.

The parrot listened to this, and looked up gently to the sky, and then fell down too. The king was even more sad. 'How foolish I was! First I gave his message to them and killed them, and now I give their message to him and kill him also'. It was all most bewildering to the king. What was the meaning of it all?

He commanded his servants to put his dead parrot on a gold tray, and bury him with all ceremony. The servants took him out of the cage with great respect, and loosed the chains from his feet; and then, as they were laying him out, the parrot suddenly flew away and sat upon the roof.

The king said, 'O parrot, you betrayed me'. The parrot said, 'O king, this was the aim of my soul, and it is the aim of all souls, My brothers in the jungle were not dead. I had asked them to show me the way to freedom, and they showed me. I did as they told me, and now I am free.'

There is a Sura in the Qur'an which says: "Mutu kubla anta mutu", which means, "Die before death." A poet says, 'Only he attains to the peace of the Lord who loses himself'. God said to Moses, 'No man shall see Me, and live'. To see God we must be nonexistent.

This is true freedom. Every opportunity to let go could be an exercise in nonattachment, and dying to the smaller self, the ego. What unfolds is a greater accommodation for the Beloved in the dwelling place of our hearts.

Pir Shabda musings on Freedom

Pir Shabda challenged us to be real and honest in our lives. He said “Don’t turn your back on your demons, but have a dialogue with them, embrace them, have ease with what arises.” We learnt a new mantra “This is how it is right now!” We were encouraged to invoke strength and courage, These attributes help us deal with what life brings. Life is there to assist our awakening. With the practice of meditation, we may still get angry, but we will recover more quickly. Our journey is a continual “Toward the One”. It is always about the journey and not the arrival.

Mahamudra says that essence is the All Living Reality. It is the soul which awakens by its own power. Every wish comes from the power of the soul to know itself. We are always looking for ways to free the soul from its captivity. The root wish of every wish is to awaken. What is the root motivation of everything you do? It is to be happy: whether we do this by skilful or unskilful means. Pay attention because guidance comes from all around you, making Life your teacher, to assist the soul’s awakening.

One favourite saying we learnt from the 12th Tai Situ Rinpoche was “Every single relative reality including everything not excluding anything is the manifestation of the incorruptible unchanged reality.”

“Everywhere you look is the face of God.”

Teachings on breath

Pir Shabda talked about the mysticism of breath and sound. He explained that the centre of the pedagogy of the Inayati stream is to live in the breath and identify with the breath. We did a dance which said that : “Each breath I take is through Thy Grace”. We were instructed to silently place the sacred names or phrases of “Toward the One” or “la illaha el allahu”, on the gentle swing of the breath . We observed our in and outbreath . This is called fikr.

On the Friday, the local Dance leaders led dances alternating by a period of meditation. This form is called a Sufi Sesshin. The embodiment process experienced through the Dances deepened the meditation practice. Pir Shabda’s recommendation for our daily practices was that we continue to do both purification breaths, recitation and meditation, for a balanced life .

The Role of Emotions

There was much talk about the breath and emotions: our teachers to awakening. We did exercises where we noticed how disturbing emotions affected the natural swing of our breath, stopping the breath. This realisation was a great encouragement to cultivate the habit of a rhythmic breath, and to become a witness to our emotions.

Centre Walks

Pir Shabda led us in the Murshid Sam walks of the centres: the solar plexus, heart and third eye. We were given a powerful transmission of both containment and boundlessness. I could feel Murshid SAM’s Presence in the walks and his genius in creating the walks. I will be doing more walks with my Dances! And in my walks to the beach etc. They are so empowering. All one needs to do is to

remember to metaphorically stick your nostrils at whatever centre you are choosing! Put it on your to-do list for 30 days and it will become a good habit, says the life coach in me. Maybe at the top of the list?

The God Ideal

We journeyed through the stages of making the God ideal till we become God Conscious,” seeing through the eyes of God,” and “hearing through the eyes of God.” We arrive at the state where we have cultivated our inner life and harmonised with our outer life: the subject of the retreat. At that time, we may realise there is no such thing as a noun and that everything is an evolving verb, constantly changing. What is a river: is it the banks, the water, the sound , the flow or is it the essence of rivering?

Pir Shabda talked a lot about interdependence and the insubstantiality of everything. He talked about “your mind is not your mind but a joint ownership.” He led us through the stages of the bardo journey after life...and much more. The stories were captivating and took us into the night, till we were basking in the veil of sleep.

The Beautiful Names

We had a day surfing the “Physicians of the Heart” book and the Beautiful Names. One of the families we spent time on were the names of strength: Ya Qadr, Ya Muqtadir, Ya Matin, Ya Qawiyy, Ya Aziz Ya Jabbar, Ya Qahhar, and Dhul Jelali Wal-Ikram. We learnt which of the names were best to place on the outbreath (the transcendent) and which went well on the inbreath (the immanent.) Pir Shabda helped us understand the significance of the verb forms, and where to find what we were looking for in the book.

We went through the family of Names which relate to forgiveness, omnipotence, time and space etc We covered a lot of ground in a short time. I am now musing on how we can continue our study of the Beautiful names. Maybe with an online group, and a regular skype/zoom call. Anyone interested can email me anna.sophiawisdom@gmail.com.

Our home grown retreat next year will have some focus on this topic.

Nine point program for Life

Finally Pir Shabda gave us a nine point checklist which included the qualities of

1. Strength,
2. Courage,
3. Kindness,
4. Compassion,
5. Forgiveness,
6. Tolerance
7. Patience
8. Gratitude and
9. “Being in tune with the Infinite”.

This is where knowledge of the Beautiful Names is a powerful invocation for assistance. I was inspired some 10 years ago to create the three volumes of the mandalas of the Beautiful names of God as a visual practice and source of daily inspiration. See my website www.sophiawisdom.com.au for more information.

Bringing these qualities into our everyday life, is a means to help one stay on purpose. As we maintain rhythm throughout life's conditions, we arrive at a state where nothing will disturb our equanimity. By this we experience that "Peace is Power" ...or "calmness is strength." The Dances can be a vehicle for reaching that state, balanced with meditation. Considering what is happening in the world, we need to maintain strength, resilience and optimism.

"Let the sun of thy divine spirit rise from my heart, that morning may break out of the darkness of life." Nature meditations, Hazrat Inayat Khan

Honoring the Silsila

There were many other stories, dances, and spiritual practices shared. It seemed Pir Shabda had an inexhaustible supply of energy and knowledge that effortlessly streamed through him, though I did see him yawn once or twice! He was very available to all of us and very human. What a blessing we all received being in the presence of the Pir who represented the Sufi silsila (lineage) of the Sufi Ruhaniat lineage stream, which was the foundation platform of the Dances. For further information see www.ruhaniat.org

One night, as Pir Shabda was sharing extensive stories of the Sufi lineage and his meetings with remarkable beings, I wondered how he remembers all those names! Knowing that each name has its own "shem," or atmosphere, light and vibration, Cedar and I were inspired to create a heartfelt ceremony, where candles were placed in all the beautiful hearts previously crafted with Karen. The hearts were lined up and became a symbolic chain of light coming down through the silsila: our predecessors.

We made a procession and sang "Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti", as the light coming from all the hearts blessed us with their radiance.

"Ancestors, sky people all here today, hear our heart song, hear our respect, hear our love. I am truly blessed, you are truly blessed, we are truly blessed.!"

Conclusion

As a dance family we were given a greater understanding of our mystic roots and how the dances are rooted in spiritual practice. We were given tools to evolve along our path. Shukur Allah, Pir Shabda!

Shukur Allah also to Diane Green, who recorded much of the teachings, dance videos and took many beautiful photos. These will renew our Dance retreat experience and allow us to drink deeper from the well of knowledge and deep love for the Dances and practices, that Pir Shabda has left us.

Zebunissa May 2017