

# Riga, Latvia

## November 11 – 13, 2005



If the number of mentees is a standard to measure growth of a region, Latvia grew immensely during our stay. Fatima is trained at the early Estonian retreats and the two Crimea Camps. For a long time our mentee Fatima for a long time held the only post for the Dances in Latvia. With small weekly sessions (one in Russian, one in Latvian) and weekend workshops with Shahodat (Russia), Silje (Estonia) and Sitara and Daren (UK) she –as she explained – carefully prepared the way to invite us. Her group is stronger now and she has two supervisees (Rita and Lidija, the last one co-mentored by us), while her sister Sveta asked mentorship with us. Fatima surprised and impressed us with the dances she led, leading us into a multidimensional exploration of the mantras involved (rather than the one-dimensional mantra experience). Once the odd one out (all Dancing & Sufi Movement), she

Latvia was connected with James, Fatima was our mentee and connected with the Sufi Movement), she now is the leading lady of Latvia.

The weekend consisted Russian style of two days from 10 am till 4 with a short lunch break in between. While you have only two sessions per day, you end up dancing as many or even more hours than in the Western style workshops of 2 hours per morning, afternoon and evening. In spite of the free evening, it ends up being quite a lot more tiring than the Western model, though not as tiring as in Perm, where we had the same schedule but for three days plus every evening another open session.

As the group was relatively new to the Dances and needed guiding in background etc., we introduced Murshid SAM and his Dances and made a mix of Foundation material and newer Dances, emphasizing on the effect of the dances and the role they can play in understanding your inner world and spirituality.

Much to our surprise, Lidija – recent mureed of Pir Shabda and founder-director of the Latvian school for social workers, invited us to do a presentation at her school (11am – 4 pm on Tuesday). You never can tell, but maybe this invitation in itself already was worth the whole trip.

Future will tell what will come out of it. For the short term we could introduce the dances and Fatima as Dance leader. The social workers had no choice but had to be present as part of their methodology course. It proved was a good example for our students how to present and choose dances to tune the group and eventually guide them towards where you can start doing the real work. As Lidija had her reasons to ask us to work towards more mutual understanding, compassion and tolerance, the session also was a good example of using the Dances to deliver a message.



Our lodging in Latvia was special: first in a very well-to-do Russian family, then in the poor Latvian family of 14-year old participant of the workshop Beate – our first ever experience in a Latvian family, as in the past the dances mainly attracted Russians living in Latvia. Latvia and especially Riga is even more Russian oriented than Tallinn, with many Russians born there but not able to speak the Latvian language. Imagine being liberated after many years of domination and still needing to speak the language of the former oppressor and you get some idea of the situation in actually the whole of the Baltics! The sarcasm and cynicism towards Russia was never far away with our host Anita, Beate's mother and indeed the inequality in division of wealth and privileges still seems to balance very much in favor of the Russians living there.

### Feedback

*Vers, dances 1 year:* Very nice energy in the dances and communication

*Inesse, dances 1/2 year:* After dances I felt myself so empty and joyful

*Aleksandr, dances 12 years:* I was happy to dance with Wali and Ariënne again

*Aiya, danced first time:* A lot of optimism and humor, nice music and rhythm, new experience for my body

*Edmund, danced first time:* Good music and singing

*Latifa, dances 12 years:* High professionals as usually. I was happy. Thanks!