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On the Path
of the Friend

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Unpublished Material

The material in this publication is from the Rahal Eks memoir, *On the Path of the Friend*, a memoir on his life in the Sufi Tradition.

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HOPE ON THE HORIZON

I talked to Sheela without wasting time to write an official invitation for Hussein. Perhaps through the association it was possible to get him over. We dressed it all up as a training program and added a copy of Maurice's work contract I had already used at the Moroccan passport office. Then we sent the letter with registered mail to the Spanish Consulate in Rabat.

The Italians had found a house for rent and were moving out, yet they continued collaborating in Sheela's project.

"We might have to give up the village house", said Sheela to me. "I imagine you don't want to live in the restaurant since there is no electricity. I have an idea. Talk to our neighbor who is here. He bought the house down the street and is using it only when he visits for a short time. Perhaps you can make a deal with him?"

"Thanks. That sounds like a great idea."

Sheela introduced me to Stephan and we I hit it off like a house on fire. What happened in the next few minutes sounded so unreal, but it wasn't a joke. Stephan offered me his house free of rent with the option to sub-rent it for 30 years. He only wanted the right to come once per year on a two-week holiday. Other than that I was supposed to maintain it as good as I could. We even made a contract and a week later I moved in and he returned to Switzerland.

The house consisted of an old building with a patio and a huge, old palm tree in the center. It had four big rooms and a bathroom. And there was a modern annex, like a studio, plus a big kitchen and another bathroom.

I continued to help Sheela in the office, although it was clearly understood that soon I'd be exclusively busy getting my dance-theater project off the ground. I already wrote tons of letters to various culture departments of cities in Andalusia. Now it was time to wait on their replies and hope for the best.

As time went by it became clear that most letters would remain unanswered. However, one letter did get a reply from the Head of the Cultural Department of Granada! Things looked promising, at least as far as Granada was concerned.

The free house in Facinas could serve as the project's countryside base, but I hoped everything would really work out in Granada, including getting a place there and proper funding for an entire ensemble. I was very excited.

As indicated by *sheikh* N. in London, I wrote a letter directly to the Master of the Sufi Order, the *pir*, informing him about my latest developments after the experience in Portugal.

The reply of the Master was instant. I received a hand-written letter and the content surprised me tremendously.

Pir N. wrote: "From the time on you have settled in a city of Al-Andalus you have the

permission to hold Sufi meditations on Thursday and Sunday nights. Get in touch with our center in Madrid to be taught the details and to obtain cassettes with our Sufi music to be used. You are not requested to look for seekers, they will manifest by themselves and you will know who is suitable. When you have questions do ask – either the Madrid center or contact me. Ya Haqq!”

Right away I called the Madrid Sufi center and a friendly foreign man, who was in charge, gave me further details on how to do things.

“I will prepare a package for you and mail it to you.”

A few days later it arrived with books by the Master and various cassettes with speeches by him in Farsi, followed by Spanish translations, and then beautiful traditional Persian Sufi music and *dhikr* chants.

Then it was time to go to Granada and meet with Don Rafael, the Cultural Delegate. I liked him right away. He was a most refined and open-minded man.

“I read your letter and proposal with great interest,” he said in Spanish. Especially your biography adds an element that is very much related to the history and culture of this city. I can’t offer you a space right now, but why don’t you write a dance-theater piece for a multicultural ensemble and I will try to get the funds for it. If it works out, you can then come to Granada and I personally would be very delighted about the manifestation of your project on a long term basis.”

I thought I was dreaming.

“May I ask you about the range of the potential budget for the dance-theater production?”

“Yes. The normal range. 1.5 Million Pesetas.”

I almost fell off the chair in delight hearing this.

“How much time do I have?” I asked.

“One month.”

“No problem, I shall present you a script in that period,” I said.

Don Rafael smiled.

“Do you have any suggestions I should know about?” I asked.

“Yes, I do. Keep in mind that the performance piece should have some relevance to Granada and its multicultural heritage.”

I shook hands and left Don Rafael’s office as if gliding on a rose-colored cloud.

First I celebrated in a restaurant with delicious seafood and Spanish wine, followed by visiting the Alhambra. I was absolutely ecstatic and already saw myself living in beautiful Granada. My Hollywood film projector was working over-time. And the elevating atmosphere of the Alhambra added to my already exalted frame of mind.

I had visited here once before in the past with my monster-lover Miguel Angel during a rare

peaceful period. Similar to my first visit, this time too it felt like coming home to a place I knew very well from another lifetime, long ago. In the *Sala de Embajadores* I again perceived a faint voice in Arabic addressing me, calling my name. It was like listening to a distant radio station from North Africa. This time I clearly heard the name and I decided to research the matter later.

At this point I only had a rather vague and foggy suspicion about my identity in that incarnation. But the feelings I sensed were strong and somehow getting clearer. There was sadness, a sense of tragedy and loss. This was mixed with a most profound dislike of Fernando II of Aragon and Isabel I of Castille, the Catholic Monarchs, who in 1492 conquered the last Moorish enclave of *Al-Andalus* with Granada as its capital.

With admiration for the beauty I walked through the different halls. On the walls the motto of the Nasrid dynasty of Granada could be read clearly carved in elegant Arabic letters above the amazing tile work: "*Wa la ghaliba ila Allah* – and there is no winner, but God."

I entered the *Patio de los Leones*, an impressive courtyard with a water fountain surrounded by twelve lion sculptures, proving that Islamic art did include figurative representations! Another example of that could be found in a stunning ceiling fresco in one of the halls further down. It was similar to Persian miniatures, only bigger.

Finally I came out of the Alhambra section and was going to the Generalife gardens. I smoked a cigarette and strolled along an ancient wall. When I walked around the corner an instant flash of clarity hit me. This very spot was the one I had seen in the dream. It was this place *Sayyed R.* had told me to search for and find in 3-D reality. The only thing missing was the snake with the two heads – everything else was identical to what I had seen in the dream. I got shivers on my back and sat down on a nearby bench. That very moment I was also hit by inspiration for the dance-theater script, I got a wonderful idea.

In high spirits I strolled through the Generalife gardens and in the late afternoon I descended from the Alhambra complex to check out Albaicín, the old Arab quarter of town. Granada's backdrop is the Sierra Nevada; it reminded me a little bit of Marrakesh with the High Atlas Mountains.

Granada's Cathedral wasn't far from the bookshop and a few minutes later I stood at the entrance. Strangely enough I was literally unable to enter. Isabel and Fernando were buried in a chapel of the Cathedral and I was not going to pay my respect to the people who supported the unholy Inquisition and its horrors. Normally I have no problem entering churches, but here I just couldn't at this point in time.

Back in Facinas I went on a creative retreat. Suspense was in the air. I worked like a maniac, entranced by inspiration.

Before the month was over I had knocked out a script on my typewriter. It already had also detailed instructions about costumes, the lighting, the set design, and the music.

I sent a letter and my script by courier to Don Rafael in Granada and waited for his reaction.

Somehow I had a good feeling. I sensed he would like my idea.

Then I wrote to *Sayyed* R. telling him about my latest news and asking him for further spiritual advice on the Sufi Path.

Unlike in the past I didn't get a fast reply by mail. Instead I had a dream one night. In the dream I entered a white room where *Sayyed* R. was sitting on a huge Persian carpet, having tea and studying a book by Rumi. The carpet suddenly rose up and stopped in mid-air. *Sayyed* R. indicated I should climb up and sit next to him. He offered me tea. Then he gave me a lecture on the meaning of Rumi's poetry with a focus on mystical love. Afterwards the carpet descended, I thanked him and said good-bye, left the room and woke up with a feeling of being filled with light, love and an enormous dose of *Baraka*.

Don Rafael's secretary sent me a fax, telling me that he liked the idea I had submitted and he was trying to obtain the required funding from the Andalusian Autonomous Province Government in Seville. This, however, would take some months.

I was in ecstasy! For the music I already found collaborators right in Facinas. There was Francisco, the Spanish musician and composer from Madrid, who was eager to collaborate, as well as Toni, a freshly imported Italian saxophone player. I even managed to get one of the Italian ladies with an Indian dance training to consider joining us once we had the budget at our disposal.

The other people for the ensemble would have to be found in Granada and elsewhere. Meanwhile we started with the music for the final scene. It was fun. We got really carried away during our music and recording sessions. And we dreamed big dreams regarding our future success. It was a lovely time, enjoying all the steps we went through.

Toni, the saxophone player rented a room from me. The next artist tenant who moved in was Joe, an American painter who showed up one day. Joe was broke and could only pay very little rent, so he offered to fix things in the house in exchange and make up for it that way. Soon after that a British woman arrived in town. Her name was Mary. She was a painter looking for a place to stay. I rented her the room with the chimney. All of this happened in time before I ran out of money. As a new landlord I suddenly had a bit of an income and could freely dedicate my time to my artistic endeavors without great worries to make instant cash. It felt very good. *Allah Karim*, I thought, God is generous.

The scenario in the house was started off easy-going and lively. We had a great time and different people cooked when they felt like. Cleaning up and the house tasks were also arranged in a relaxed way without rigid rules. In short, we were an intercultural household of artists and things were flowing nicely as they should.

Francisco, Toni and I kept working on the music. On the side I participated in a Reiki course and was trained in aroma and Bach flower therapy.

Autumn was coming and with it some rain. The roof of the house began to leak. It was a

nightmare. We had to improvise with plastic sheets under the ceiling and plenty of buckets. During this season the house was damp with cold humidity lurking everywhere. For heating we had a chimney, an old-fashioned wood stove and movable gas heaters. Things were getting moldy. It was a bit of a rough ride staying in a place like this. Yet I tried to focus on the positive side of things and be grateful.

Sheela had bad news for me. We still hadn't heard anything about Hussein's visitor's visa and she had meanwhile inquired with a lawyer who had connections to the immigration office, and who knew about the latest EU laws. Hussein's chances looked more than grim under the given circumstances. However, I was not going to give up yet.

The day Francisco, Toni and I finished recording the music for the *grand finale* another fax arrived from Granada. Don Rafael reported with great regrets that the funds in Seville for extraordinary cultural events were cut down to zero. In other words, *adios* to the 1.5 Million Pesetas I had expected. However, he advised me to still come and settle in Granada... "*something else may manifest...*"

This was a big blow to my optimism. It affected all involved as well.

A letter arrived one day from the Sufi center in Madrid. I was asked to visit Fatima, an Iranian woman who now lived in a small *Costa del Sol* town. She was a fellow dervish of the order and alone. Somehow I got the idea that Fatima needed help and right away I took the bus to visit her.

An older woman who didn't come across as needy greeted me. *Au contraire*, she was rock solid and oozing with strength. Her spiritual power and her faith were overwhelming and it was I who got help from her by listening to her life's story.

"I was married and have two kids. We lived in Isfahan. My husband was a terrible alcoholic who often beat me up and one day I just had enough. So I took my kids, a couple of suitcases and flew to London. The only person I knew was the Master. I entered the Sufi Path and ever since my life has changed for the better. It was very difficult in England and I didn't like it at all, so we moved to Spain and settled here. Now my kids are grown up and all is going well. All I can tell you is – regardless what happens – stick to doing your *dhikr*."

Fatima was like a laser of clear intention. The impact of her line "stick to doing your *dhikr*" was engraved on my inner being with a tremendous power I shall never forget. And ever since I've met her, I followed her advice.

About the Author

Rahal Eks is the author of KHALIL & MAJNUN and HUSSEIN & THE NOMAD, both memoirs. He was a long time columnist for Huriyah magazine, writing about his travels. Currently, he teaches the Sufi Tradition on his website:

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