





There is something about life that fascinates me, especially when it courses through me so quickly that I find myself doing things that I cannot rationally place - just because it is what Life is telling me to do. Such a moment happened in June when I was at Axladitsa visiting Kamyar who was hosting the place and being hosted by Freddie and the Cats. We were sitting at the outdoor kitchen table, talking with a gentle wind blowing - and I can't quite remember what it was we were saying, but we suddenly looked into each others' eyes with a knowing that it was time to go to Iran. We spoke our intention – we made a commitment to journey together - me for my first time to Iran and Kamyar the first time in two years being in his homeland. Wowser - that is how it happens - Life goes BOOM - and you do it!!

The journey having began, required me getting a visa, if I was to actually journey to the land and people. Being a Greek citizen was a bonus – the current regime does not have a problem with Greeks – Canadians, Brits and Americans are the difficult ones – and well Israelis – well they are a complete no go zone. We decided that having someone in Iran apply for the visa was the way to go – so Aydin and Yasser – two beautiful Iranian friends of Kamyar (and now mine) applied for me and were successful in obtaining a 30-day visa for me. This was sent to the Iranian Embassy in Athina – and I on the last day possible (it was Friday and I was leaving on Sunday – I am a true Just-in-Time Greek) went to have my passport stamped.

I somehow knew that I was going to enter into a bit of an adventure with it – so I was not totally surprised when I did. I realised that I was being taught my first lesson in Iranian culture. These are very playful people who easily traverse the visible and invisible realms. So, the Iranian passport man of the Embassy taught me this Iranian game where first you are told it is not possible, then you are made to feel like you are special and finally you are treated like part of the family. I kind of enjoyed it – although also harrowing as I needed to get more health insurance - and only having half an hour to do so - then having technical problems getting an email through – and finally being given my passport with a beautiful visa stamped in it. Driving home I received two frantic calls – one from my travel agent and the other from Mark Taplin saying the Iranian Embassy was asking me to return as they had not photocopied my passport. After driving back with Odysseas and Nikos - and getting hopelessly lost - and a sweet exchange with the passport man who by this time was my brother - my passport photocopied and safely back in my bag. I was ready to go to Iran.

I spent the next couple of days wondering what the hell I was really going there for – and knowing that I really did not need to know – and that so long as I got through customs ok and met Kamyar – I would be fine. Anna helped me sort out my clothes so that I could take on a chic Islamic look – as I knew my head would need to be covered – and I was not to show too much body – skin or shape. So I packed my bag – put in all the little gifts I had bought for family and friends – and set off to the airport with a taxi – and a bit of a lump in my throat – both nervousness and excitement as to what I would meet in this land and its people.





Arriving and Orienting

My journey was great - and I began to pick up the Persian vibe at the gate in Istanbul - beautiful people, excited children, regal elders. I felt this deep calm in me - knowing that I was stepping once again into my unknowing with curiosity - and that slight rational thought of "Maria why are you always doing this – always on the edge?" Arriving in Tehran – and sailing through customs was a sign – I had this intense feeling that this land was happy to have me here. Coming down the stairs to pick up my bag - I saw Kamyar waiting for me and I felt such joy - Kamyar!! My bag was the first to come through and I was quickly out and after a quick hug (not too much public touching and affection allowed) - we were in a taxi and driving into Tehran. It was just after the big Summit – when the countries - not aligned with the US, Canada, UK and Europe had gathered in Tehran - so Iranian flags were everywhere - as were all the countries who had come to the Summit. Somehow Greece came too - although obviously aligned with the Big Powers – probably a show of gratitude for Iran continuing to sell us oil when other countries have not due to our credit rating.

I felt the land and the city. It was soft – quiet – a deep pulse – a deep stillness. The mountains surrounding Tehran drew my attention – including the tallest peak in Iran that is a sleeping volcano. Beautiful. Tehran is far from being a beautiful city – it used to be a series of villages that about 200 years ago became the capital of Iran. However, perhaps it was because it was 6 a. m. – there was this sweet feeling to this huge city of 18 million people of many tribes

and ethnicities – although the main one of course is Persian. We arrived at Kamyar's family flat – a nice spacious place – that reminded me of my family's place in Athens as it is closed up most of the time. Kamyar had cleaned and set it up for us – the fridge was full – I had his room (he was on the sofa) – and I had a choice of using the Iranian loo or the European style loo. We cooked eggs and Iranian bread – sat down with coffee and looked into each other eyes with joy. We were too excited to check in – too much structure – we just talked!! After about an hour – I was exhausted having travelled through the night – so we decided to have a short 'schlaffen' (somehow we go German when speaking sleeping) – and then see what the day might hold for us.

So the day was one of arriving and orienting – after our sleep – we went to find Uncle Ismail – Kamyar's uncle - brother of his father - to change Euro's into Tomans. We stepped through this door into a magical land that was their office of their thriving family business. Sister and Brother were running a business that does 'everything' - one a Polymer Scientist and the other a Chemical Engineer – have created special teflon cookware and other great things. It was more of a community centre than an office - tea, raisins, and other goodies were produced, laughter, jokes and conversation took place. We spoke in spirals about family, business, politics in Iran and elsewhere - and I felt the dervish dance begin. I fell in love with Uncle Ismail - especially his eyes – that twinkled and shone – and his laugh, a big belly full laugh. Big envelops of money were handed to Kamyar - and I laughingly said, "I like this place because I am being given money and not giving money." "I will come again", I said. "Yes", they responded, "Tomorrow, for more money and lunch – we will cook you something special." How can a girl refuse such hospitality?



After lunch, we walked along the streets, looking at shops. I spotted a beautiful weaving shop where traditional and ancient patterns are printed. Kamyar expressed his amazement of my 'eye' picking this shop up, as they really offered special things. I told him he was now witnessing the Scordialos women special gift of finding beautiful, expensive and authentic things. We bought some beautiful pillowcases and table coverings and found a great little coffee shop nearby to stop and begin our first conversation on the feminine and masculine and relationships/partnership. We drank iced coffee and imagined partnerships that work through the soul

– we shared experience of where we are living this – we began to speak about the mature masculine archetypes. Kamyar opened up his knowing of this and I sat there watching this beautiful man unfold before my eyes – I kept blinking thinking "Wowser, this man is big – I think I have something to learn here!!" So I opened up my soul's ears then and arrived that little bit more. We were so into our conversation that we realised that we were late for our dinner date at Aydin's house – with his mum and Yasser. After a long taxi ride through traffic – we arrived at their beautiful flat.





Embracing the Learning Ecology

Aydin, is a beautiful young leader of Iran. He has this still presence and strong yet gentle masculine. Looking at him, I wondered if I was witnessing an example of the feminine and masculine in unity? His smile and laugh makes a girl's knees go weak – so needless to say I felt my knees that night!! His mother, a gracious and beautiful woman in her mid 50's, widowed as her husband passed away a few years ago, cooked us the most beautiful Iranian meal. Yasser – a friend of Aydin's brother who now lives in the UK (like Greece, many young people are leaving Iran for the UK, Canada, Australia, etc.) joined us. He is part of the trio – with Aydin and

Kamyar who are dreaming up a place in the country where they can create space where different people can come and live and enterprise. Yasser is also beautiful and again carries this gentle, shy masculine – loves sweets and smiles coyly at you. There is this lovely male friendship between the three men – deeply caring and relational. I felt this incredible sense of hope watching them – everything will be all right in the world with men like this.

All day I have been looking into the eyes of these people – women and men, (I am not really supposed to look into the men's eyes so I quickly learned how to appear to be looking down but then glance quickly – just enough of a glance and look away). They have big open eyes – windows into their souls – a mirror as to how open their souls are. Yet – I quickly noticed that the men have a trauma to them – their gentle souls have been deeply wounded by

a Journey, a Story, a Life

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the years of brutal war and a government that has two faces but one puppeteer. Iran is the only country that has a democratic side to her government and an Islamic side. One led by an elected president and the other by a Supreme Leader. It is the latter that calls the shots – and the current President has been placed there although presidential elections did take place and the opposition won – but the leader is now under house arrest. It feels like the Supreme Leader has just replaced the Shah - the need to have this 'external king' archetype is a big topic between Kamyar and I - and it came up several times in the week. What would our world be like if we claimed our inner King - and did not need the external ones - or was our world more healthy when we had Kings as external archetypes – and what about the syndrome that keeps happening to these King figures - becoming narcisstic to the point of what is being experienced in Syria – where the King does not feel the killing of his own people that he is committing?

The people of Iran hold these deep roots of the Persian bloodline – a very ancient people coming from ancient soil. Their women are regal, beautiful and hold themselves with such grace. I loved seeing that a form of resistance in the country is how the women wear their head scarves. Instead of making themselves look modest - or even invisible - they wear these beautiful scarfs – in different styles, e. g. the harem girl look, the village lady look, the 1950's Parisian look, etc. The scarf is the ultimate accessory that finishes an outfit off. I took to wearing scarfs as if I was a duck to water. There were times when I got really hot and felt like tearing it off my head, but on the whole, I loved it. It was an act of becoming that little bit more aware of stepping out from one's private space into the public space. The bit that took more of my energy was making sure that no inappropriate body parts were showing - and this basically included everything to even ones ankles let alone a little bit of cleavage. I also had to master the art of keeping the scarf on my head when it was windy. Kamyar was my scarf police – and got into the habit of just gently saying 'scarf' which meant - it's off your head and get it back on. The only bit of modern Iranian culture that really troubled me was seeing that it really is in fashion to have one's nose altered - we kept seeing young women and even young men with bandages on their noses which was a tell tale sign that they had been under the knife in search of a little French upturned nose. Another trend had to do with eyebrow sculpting which made the women look quite severe. Kamyar, in particular was distressed with this practice and we decided that any future potential partner would need to have 'natural' brows.

A beautiful part of the Iranian culture is the relationship between women and men. The Moslem tradition creates a natural distinction that to an outsider can look like it favours men. I came to see something very different. Women are masters at 'kareshme-va-naz' - the practice of invitation and slowing down. It is a rhythm of relating that goes like this: I invite you with a glance – and if you come that little bit too close - I push you away - again with a glance or an enigmatic movement of my body. Oh so subtle – but very seductive. This creates a tension between the genders – a dance that seems to have been forgotten in many parts of the world - especially as women have sought their equality in the western world. Of course there can exist a big shadow side to this - a form of manipulation that leaves both genders in a constant tug of war, but I saw a kind of balance act to this - as if women receive and give and so do the men.

Then speaking to Kamyar's 18 year old cousin -Solale – a beautiful young woman with luminous eyes - I heard the frustration of a generation that wants to express themselves but feel held back by their current government. She spoke of knowing her roots and feeling proud of them, especially as she was just back from Germany on a Goethe Institute programme where she had witnessed how Iranians were able to respond quickly and adapt, where other cultures struggled to do so. She liked knowing that she has a Muslim practice and she said it does not matter what your tradition is so long as you practice it. Solale is at a crucial pivot point in her life - waiting for her exam results to see if she has made it into University. She spoke how she too had protested the previous year, but had seen terrible violence and now felt that there was a new way and that protesting did not change anything. She was going to university, she did not want to attract too much attention - and from there would see what life held for her.

As night was falling, Aydin took me out for a drive to see the city. We got horrifically entangled in the traffic – so we spoke about his waiting to receive a Danish visa to attend this year's Kaos Pilot



programme – and how he was ok waiting but that it was draining his energy. I got this sense that perhaps he was not completely sure of going. I felt this deep responsibility in this young man to his mother, his girlfriend, his country - I felt the strength of the leader in him, especially as he showed me the Political prison where many liberal and great minds are kept locked up. It is known as the 'university of Tehran' as many students and professors are there. I was glad for the traffic and for seeing this – it would have gone unnoticed and I would not have seen this difficult side to the current regime of Iran. I asked Aydin if he was committed to going to Denmark or was there some question still lingering in him. He looked at me with his beautiful eyes and they spoke the truth - no words needed - I am prepared to go and my full heart is here in my country. I found myself speaking that if they do not give him the visa he should not believe that he is not free – that he does not have choice in life. The dominant system of this civilisation has a founding pillar that choice being able to have anything you want is considered God - money is the vehicle for this. But Life on its own accord gives us choice - and we choose or sometimes an event or action of life chooses for us. We are free by our birth not because we can do whatever we want. No, this has bred hubris in us - and in Ancient Greece this was the greatest sin you could commit - to think you are greater than the gods. So I spoke this - do not think you do not have choice – being in Iran is a great choice. Again a deep knowing look – no words.

This day and the next were spent in Tehran – and we visited family and I write this now as if they are my family, because in some way they have become so to me. When you share your soul even just a little piece of it with someone, they become family. I saw this so openly in this country - this open soul sharing. We went for dinner to Kamyar's aunt, his mum's sister on the second day - and I will never forget when the door opened and 5 beautiful woman were there - like butterflies - laughing embracing us so excited that we were there. This family has experienced deep pain, but you would not know it by the love that pours out of every cell. The beauty of their hospitality entranced me. They have survived the pain by joking and teasing one another. I was soon in the spirit of this - teasing and being teased. I saw where Kamyar's love of the feminine soul comes from. Oh the strength of holding so much pain with beauty. We were fed fantastic Iranian food until I thought I was going to burst. For example faludeh – orgasmic, Iranian ice cream. It is kind of something more than ice cream – so I cannot really describe it – but I am already craving it and wondering where I can find it in Europe -I need to seek out the Iranian neighbourhoods. Language did not seem to be a barrier – seeing with the eyes of the soul is a language that does not need words – just a touch, a gesture, a brief glance at the right moment - and so much is transmitted on so many levels. Kamyar's family – the Iranian people – know this language – they are keepers of the secrets of this language. I was so happy to re-member it



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- we all know it. I am eternally grateful that these people, land and culture have kept is as a keepsake for all of us.

I had this incredible sense of paradox from the first day I got to Tehran, but I could not put my finger on it. It was only after being in the country for a few days that I began to see it more clearly. I began to notice that hidden in the political situation of the country that is demonised on our TV screens – as fundamentalist Islamic rule – an evil against the great democracies of the West, (in case you are not getting it – I am being sarcastic here) – I began to see something else. I decided to dig a little further. By this I mean listen and notice at a level that the 'normal' ear will not hear. I began to hear that this Islamic rule - that yes, has curtailed a certain expression of its people and in the beginning was very brutal – has also been a protector of the roots of this country - the ancient, deeply held roots - even pre-Islam. By closing the borders and kicking out the foreigners, e. g. saying no to British who were running their oil refineries and who told them they did not know how to run them – they nurtured a very important Eastern quality that runs at the heart of the soul of these people and land. It is being selforganised. It is letting chaos reign, because this is a crucial element or condition for self organisation to take place. Kamyar spoke of how the sanctions on the country from Europe and the US, has ignited an inherent innovative streak in the people. Medicines sold through western pharmaceutical

companies, for example, stopped being provided due to the sanctions. So Iranian chemical engineers set about discovering their own formulas - and breaking the patents of the big pharmaceuticals. Another example is that benzene was not produced in the country and again due to the sanctions, a necessity for innovation was created and solutions were discovered locally. So the sanctions have not curtailed the country, instead it has birthed its innovative spirit. The power of necessity is so often overlooked and wrongly so, by the power of patent, money, corporate, government, etc. Yet when things fail, when we need to, we find the way forward. The Iranian people know this first hand. The Islamic government and the West's response to their own shadow of Supreme Leadership has paradoxically, protected Iran from being overrun by hyper capitalism and the harvesters of natural resources, who have forgotten what it means to be human. Can you imagine what Iran would be like if this had not happened – as Kamyar said, "We would be worse than Dubai."

As the days passed I was amazed by how the people of Iran are living in a parallel universe to both the Islamic regime and also the western take over. They seem to have found a happy medium, a space between spaces. They have carved a niche that somehow fuses the ancient pattern and wisdom with modern necessity for innovative ways of living.

Which brings me to the story of the carpet.





Traveling to the Subterranean

We made our way to Esfahan on the third day of our journey. We took a VIP bus for 5.5 hours from Tehran. We snoozed and talked. I was completely mesmerised by the mountain range that suddenly rose to our right. I watched kilometres of mountains, knowing that what I was able to see is only the first layer of thousands of kilometres of mountains. The more I looked at them, the more I began to see that these mountains are breathing – their hearts are beating very slowly – but they are alive. I looked more closely to the contours. They had folds in them, soft and rounded with others jagged and as if they had scales. Scales – wowser – were those scales? Were they really mountains?

I closed my eyes and saw huge wings unfold slowly and I saw heads being lifted, preparing for flight. I then knew – these are dragons – resting, slumbering dragons and one day they will awaken and take flight. I thought of Talal and wanted to call him to let him know where the dragons are. They hold wisdom and stories not told in many years - they hold spells and magic - and deep love that was misunderstood and killed by St George. But they are not dead – they are here in Iran, resting, waiting for the time when it will be right for them to take flight again – to take us to a new world. I felt such relief knowing that the dragons were not dead that they are still with us. I kept telling Kamyar and he would smile coyly - I think he has known this all along and just not told anyone.

Arriving in Esfahan felt like we slipped from arriving and orienting and embracing the learning ecology to slipping into the subterranean. Just like that — one minute you are in the visible — the next minute you step over the threshold — and poof — you meet the wild soul. That is Esfahan folks!

We entered into our 5 star hotel, an old renovated caravanserai with much opulence but run by the government so the service took a little getting used to. After checking into our rooms, we had a very overpriced lunch and felt a wee bit disoriented. Where the hell have we ended up, we thought? Yet by the evening, after we came back from our first walk in the City, we came to a transformed inner courtyard garden, which completely answered our question of why we had chosen this hotel. But more of that later.

That first afternoon we walked out of the hotel and walked towards the main square of the City - we knew that this was the 'shop front' of the City and not the source place as directed by Kamyar's uncle Hossein, but we wanted to get a feel for the City. The first mosque we went to, Sheikh Lotf Allah, is a museum - no longer used for worship and it had beautiful patterned tiles. We walked in and stood in different parts of the mosque - blown away by these ancient patterns. It was so easy to see the difference between the Persian one's and the Arabic ones. The Persian are more spirals and rounded whist the Arabic ones, more geometric. You could feel the feminine energy of the Persian ones and the more masculine energy of the Arabic. We left and walked around the square, noticing that people were picnicking wherever they could.



On our way back to the hotel – we met the carpet. OMG it was beautiful! Kamyar had been warned by his father to not look at any carpet shops in Esfahan, so we were being very careful to not do this. Yet as we passed this particular carpet shop – we both stopped. We had a feeling that this was more than a carpet shop simply selling Persian carpets. Yes they were selling carpets - but we both could see that these were not the usual kind of carpets. What were they? Why were we so transfixed? We were invited into the shop and I knew this was dangerous - but hey, you can't be careful all your life - right? We were shown other smaller carpets - beautiful too perfectly square with gorgeous colours. Again - we wondered what made this so beautiful. Slowly the story revealed itself. The carpets are new designs – even the concept of kilim and silk carpet is a new fusion. They are the idea of the son of the shop owner - an Esfahani by birth. The wool is dyed with natural dyes in Esfahan. Nomads weave the carpets in their homes. The patterns are ancient motifs – the design is of this modern time. Now we began to understand why these carpets had called us into this shop, they were speaking to us of the new language that comes from fusion – comes from bringing together the old and the new – comes from the roots and the shoots that are growing together. Well – I fell in love – with all of it of course, and especially the carpet – what it was speaking – what it was promising – what it was inviting. I said I had to sleep on it, knowing I did not have the money to buy even the small one – but knew that something had happened in me and that I was not going to buy a carpet – no – I was going to step into a new pattern. But for now I was logical....

We walked out of the shop, slightly zoned out in a different realm and wandered down the street, thinking of what to eat and where. Iran is not like Greece, with tavernakia and coffee shops all over the place. I was dying for a glass of wine – and some meze. No alcohol – unless you have your connection and we did not have one in Esfahan. So, instead, we did it Iranian. We went to a corner shop and bought cold cuts, bread, (beautiful flat bread from the baker), olives (we stopped by a little shop just selling olives - even from Greece - and we took the sellers card as he was interested in buying olives from Greece – an idea began to incubate in me) - and we picnicked on a park bench. We shared stories, mainly myself of my journey from 1997 to 2011, which blew Kamyar away. I still have no idea why I spoke this then. Our little park bench became a safe haven to share from the heart and this is something about Iran I noticed. The numinous world, the more translucent world is much closer than other places. This reminded me something of my own homeland – Greece – how the invisible is part of the visible world – the sacred with the mundane. It shows up in the way one talks and looks at the other, where one finds the right place to be in meaningful conversation, the ease in which you do not think, but just become the movement. I loved this park bench, it transported me at the same time back to the past and also forward to the future.

I also think it was something in the quality of Kamyar's listening. Phew – when a man can listen to a woman's soul speak - and vice versa - the soul becomes present. It too is no longer hidden, instead it becomes bones and skin, it becomes blood and sweat, it becomes a living and breathing thing. Unity of the body and soul happens so that the body becomes the mirror of the soul, the soul the mirror of the body. I noticed this again and again through our conversations. Why had I just spoken that – where did it come from – how did I have this knowing? I noticed the deep sense of freedom that was rising up in me. Was I becoming the land of Iran? Was it infusing me and inviting me to become my own free wild soul? Kamyar was her avatar teaching me how to 'plug in' into the life force of the place through his interaction with me. I was being seen for who I am, not what he wanted me to be, not what I should be, but for simply being a woman, one who dares to be just that – a woman – in all her rawness. It was so liberating. I felt all the 'learned' western notions of being a woman slip off me as a satin robe does. I began to see my own silhouette reflected in our conversations, in our interaction, in our friendship. I remembered through the ages, Isis – the triple goddess that incorporates Lilith and Eve. She is the goddess of life and death – not afraid to love deeply, feel the birth pains, nurture and cultivate unconditionally and also let die what no longer is needed. I felt this in Iran's embrace, I saw this in the motifs of the patterns in the tiles of the mosques, I sensed this as I put on my head scarf, I saw it reflected in the eyes of the Iranian people, I experienced it when we walked across a madly busy street with cars coming at you and Kamyar walked on the side that if a car hit me, it would hit him first, I noticed it in how Aydin looked at me.



I could not escape that, as women, in our need for equality in the West, (and bless those women who fought for this) we just might have forgotten to love our men in a particular way. In loving ourselves – we forgot that we need our men to love us too - not only for what we do, but for what we are - being women! If we remember this and love ourselves simply for being woman, would this entice our men to love themselves for being men? Could we then find a new unity in relationship that is based on loving oneself for what we are with the other reflecting to us the unity we hold in ourselves? Big questions came through me. Deep questions that took some of what is sacred and made it mundane and vice versa. I love it when life does this to me - gives me a nice smack to wake me up - and I actually do!! We walked back to our hotel - and

upon arriving - thought to look at what might be happening in the garden. We stepped into a magical wonderland - the caravanserai was truly alive. It was full of people of all ages. Children running around and playing, older people sitting and sipping tea, married women with their families gossiping and talking, business men doing their deals. I felt the ages of the past again - the camels would have been over there - and we probably would be sitting on carpets, with food and tea in front of us. Yet I also felt that what I was living right now, this moment - this deep vibe of life - would be exactly the same as I was experiencing right now. We were tired but I could not pull away from this magic. So we found a table, quite miraculously actually, as the place was literally full and slipped into the caravanserai world by talking more about relationships.



This is what our whole trip was like actually—we kept finding miraculously exactly what we longed for. This was one of the ways in which we continuously met the mystery—finding ourselves being Sufi. We would think something, or briefly talk about it and then hey presto there it was. Just like the next day after an amazingly spiritual and sacred day, I wanted pizza, (yes—you need ridiculous as well as sublime). I spoke it to Kamyar and he looked at me with a shrug of his shoulder, saying, "I don't really know where we will find pizza, but a very good idea, I would love a pizza." Just then the taxi we were in, turned a corner and every other shop was a pizza joint—honestly—I am not lying!

We ate pizza that night and I heard the story of Kamyar getting 80 lashes in his 20's for having been caught with his friends drinking alcohol in the forest. I was completely blown away by this story – being whipped for drinking vodka. Yet what really this story was about and what woke something up deep inside me was Kamyar's perspective about this being an initiation for him. I was amazed by his choice to receive the lashes (instead of paying which he could have done) because he could tell that the man who was going to whip him was doing it from a deep place of wishing to purify him. This blew open in me a completely new perspective. How to surrender to what life is giving you – even 80 lashes.

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How important being initiated is and how we have lost this practice in our lives, that leaves us being adolescent throughout our whole lives. Surrender entered into my being through this story – and this had been the focus of the entire day - surrender to surrendering.

My story is becoming a spiral – which is exactly what it was like living it - I will jump to the beginning of the Surrender Day. It was our first full day at Esfahan - and I woke up excited and very tired having slept very late the night before, writing an email - and also not slept well - dreams that I could not remember. I looked out my window and was amazed at how the garden had taken off it's caravanserai magic and was now a beautiful and quiet garden - back to the visible world. We met for breakfast in a very opulent dinning room with many choices and I had lentils (Iranian breakfast) with scrambled eggs and cherry juice. We politely spoke and sensed that we had a DAY ahead of us. What did we feel like doing? We knew that we had to walk to the Msjed Jameh, the Mosque that Kamyar's uncle had told him is the source point of Esfahan. Could we walk there or was it too far? We asked and they told us about 20 minutes

walk. Could we believe this as when we were with Kamyar's aunt and cousins, we had many laughs of how Esfahanis are notorious at sending their visitors around detours in their city just for fun? Were we being Esfahanied, we wondered?

We decided to chance it because it felt so right to just walk in the city - and find our way to this place. It was a wonderful and meandering walk much longer than 20 minutes as I remember it and everyone we asked said it is just 200 metres more. We were esfahanied - but worth it! We walked through the bazaar, not a tourist one, but the real thing. I loved the smells, the people, the many things that caught my eye. We stopped at a stall where an older man was making rope shoes. Kamyar let out an exclamation, "Oh, I want to buy a pair or these shoes - traditional Iranian shoes, worn in villages." So we stopped and tried them on and each bought a pair from the Iranian Pappou, (Grandfather in Greek). We continued through the bazaar and slowly we began to feel that the Mosque was not far away - we just knew we were getting closer. The streets became quieter. We walked down some small side streets – and then we were there.



Masjed Jameh is very different to any mosque I have been in because it had four different gates. Usually, when you enter into a mosque, there is a courtyard, with one building and with two minarets. Here there were four gates or buildings, with one them being the main mosque where prayer took place. We went to this part of the Mosque and were amazed by the beauty of the patterns in the tiles. I stood there for a long time seeing the swirls and

curves of the motifs. I noticed what looked like a large font (in the Christian tradition this is where we baptise babies). Why was it here, I wondered. It was beautiful carved from a large rock. I again felt that amazing feeling inside me about the rocks of the land – what is this? We intuitively sensed that it was a container for water and this was confirmed later when Kamyar asked a man about its purpose. Looking at the carved stone, I felt that the



relationship between the water and the stone created some form of alchemy, that released another form of sacred power. Something happens when stone and water meet – when they shape one another – when they surrender to each others natures but also to the new energy they release through their interconnectivity.

We noticed another place of water, right in the centre of the courtyard, a fountain. This is not unusual in a Mosque, but we sensed this as more than a fountain. We slowly walked towards it and without speaking we both could sense that here rests the Source point of Esfahan. Underneath a covered fountain area (which did seem a bit strange that it was covered) there was what looked like a Shiva Lingum to me. This is a Hindu symbol, the male sexual organ of Shiva, the fertiliser, the giver of life, the masculine archetype. It really felt that this masculine symbol was placed over the most feminine place - the Source point - uniting the feminine and the masculine. Was this place a unity place? Was Esfahan created as a place where the energy of unity was fostered and from which everything else was built around? Was this why the place feels so well balanced?

Whilst standing there looking at this sacred place, a most beautifully ordinary scene unfolded before our eyes. An older woman probably well in her 70's if not her 80's, walked across the courtyard, muttering to herself. She immediately caught my attention and I asked Kamyar to listen to what she was saying. She came to the fountain to wash before going into prayers, as is the Muslim tradition. As she was washing her feet and hands and top of her head, she continued to talk to another man who was also there preparing for prayer. She was complaining that the streets of Esfahan were not like they used to be for she was very tired after her walk to the Mosque. She kept inquiring into what had happened to the streets to make her so tired? Why were they so difficult to walk across? Nothing was like it used to be. The man listened to her intently and then ever so gently he asked her, "Could it be that you are now older and it is this that has tired you - and not the streets of Esfahan?" She looked at him with utter surprise and replied very indignantly, "Who says I am older – it is the streets." We both laughed at the how the Source point was speaking through this beautiful woman – for like the woman herself, the Source point might be ancient, but it still comes for prayer - and wonders why has so many things changed that make us so tired now?





We found ourselves moving to the opposite side of the Mosque – and upon entering a covered area, we were hit by the most amazing smell of damp earth. Just pure wet earth – her moisture, her pure fertility, her dampness. I noticed that here there were no tiles just mud bricks, laid in such a way that created a beautiful pattern of its own. I stood looking at yet another stone water container, listening to a man explain it to some other people in Pharsee. I stood, hesitating to move further inside as it felt like a really sacred place. Kamyar invited me to come inside, an area that seemed to take you deeper into the womb of this place. I went tentatively, feeling that I was entering somewhere I need to be more aware of where I was going - and even ask permission. Suddenly, two young men came up to Kamyar and asked him if I was his friend and where was I from. Kamyar said 'Unan', Greece, and they

asked me if I could tell them what I thought of Iran. They were such sweet, young men – so happy to be speaking to a foreigner. I said I could feel that Iran was a sacred place, a holder of deep secrets that our world will need soon. One of them burst out saying in English "What about the politics"? I looked at him and told him that I could feel that the people of Iran do not feel listened to by their government, that they have suffered because of this and still do. They smiled, knowing smiles, showing me through their eyes that my assessment was correct and had the mark in their hearts. It felt that they had needed to hear this in order to continue living in hope that one day there will be another way. I felt a sadness in my heart, I felt that longing of all of us to be free, I sent a prayer in this holy place that this may be so. They thanked me and moved on.



We sat down and I felt the veils separating our visible world from the numinous on part and open. I felt like I had jumped into the scene of the High Priestess from the Tarot cards. An older woman was sitting behind us. A group of friends or family were having their lunch in the corner on a blanket they had spread out. I took in the smell of the place, breathing it in deeply into my lungs. Kamyar sat next to me and I felt my gaze softening to see more. At some point, I felt he had left me and saw him talking to the man about the stone water container.

Something happened then in terms of time, an opening happened. I cannot remember well what it was but everything slowed down — there was complete stillness. I closed my eyes in reverence. I heard a clear voice inside me, and it felt like my soul opened and I was given direct connection to all unity. I was given a message that still makes my soul vibrate. I was told to not be afraid. What I heard shook me to my core — how can this be? I promised to not be afraid. This was my first surrender — how can you not surrender when Life speaks directly to



you – no symbols, no dreams, no warning – just a voice. I remember feeling Kamyar again next to me and feeling safe. I remember reaching for my diary and writing what I could remember of the message. Another wave of stillness came over me and again I was spoken to. I did not write this piece down and

I wish I had. I just remember being told repeatedly to not be afraid. I wondered if what I heard was my own longing or really a message – and what the difference anyways? The Pythia, Oracle of Delphi, only heard riddles – perhaps there is a riddle in this that I need to decipher?



A voice spoke from my left, this time a man, telling us that it was prayer time and that I would have to wear a chador. This is the full body covering the conservative Muslim women wear which covers their entire body and is usually black. I told Kamyar that I did not want to go into prayer. Then we walked to leave and the man stopped me and said I have to wear a chador even to cross the courtyard - and did I not want to go to prayer? Here I received the second invitation to go to prayer. I took a chador, it was white with blue flowers and put it over me. Kamyar looked at me with so much love in his eyes, that it stopped me in my tracks. Walking across the courtyard, Kamyar asked me gently, "Do you not want to go in to prayer?" Invitation number three and this time I knew prayer was calling me. I said I would go in and sit in the corner and watch. I took my shoes off and entered the women's section of the Mosque. Kamyar also went in on the men's side. I found a corner, but not too far from the women. The Mullah called the first prayer and the women bent from their wastes in the first position of the prostration. I watched and to utter amazement, I found my body – not me with my mind – my body, involuntarily, bending in the same position. A memory flooded my blood – I knew this movement. The Mullah called again - I went on my knees with all the other women. The Mullah calls, I now place my head on the ground in total prostration - total surrender. I feel it go through my whole body, opening me up. I am bowing to that which I will

never be able to give words to - that which moves the life force – that which will always be a mystery. I bow, my head on the floor and I pray using my own words, my own Christian prayers in Greek and in English. It does not matter, what matters is the surrender – allowing my body – my soul – to direct me to surrender. This movement moves through me four times - then a pause - we hear the men speaking the names of the saints from next door. The Mullah calls again and we go into another pattern of four prostrations - again I feel my body's relief - my body sighing a deep breath that she is free to be in reverence in this moment. I can almost see myself from up above – yet at the same time I am in my body and in my movement of prostrations. This unity of being detached and utterly involved was pure elegance - exquisite. I felt so safe in my Chador and I now realise why women wear them. They are not to hide under as we perceive in the West, or to be covered up and be controlled by men. No - they are protection, they are a shield of privacy, they create a cloak of intimacy that can only be between you and the Beloved. I loved the chador I was wearing for it allowed me to be with myself, yet also connected to the women around me and also to the men in the other part of the mosques – no separation – yet distinction. This knowing my boundary – and dancing with others as a shoreline is what gives balance to the individual and collective. It allows me to be both at the same time.

So much of our cultures give credence to either the individual or the collective. Too much collective leads us to not know that we are a Self and too much individual cuts us off from the greater whole. This learning to dance around the balance point the place of 'and' not either/or – is so important to our conscious evolution as human beings. The place where we can have many co-existing truths, instead of the one way, the one truth that leads to the extreme and so often brings out our hate, violence and even evil. I felt, in the Mosque, in my chador, on that land where many religions have been in prayer - I felt that balance point. I am Christian, Greek Orthodox, in a Muslim holy place, that stands on the foundations of a Judaic temple and that stands on the shoulders of a Zorastrian sacred site, and before that - who knows...it is all one. And at the same time as I stepped out of the mosque and looked for Kamyar – I felt how the Western media, the Western politics (of which I live in) demonises Islam, how the Iranian government defiantly responds and how this ugly dance creates rifts between the Iranian people, their land and the rest of the world and therefore, cuts all of us off from the beauty we could be together. I felt the life force course through me and I got a glimpse of what brought me here - the love that lives in me had invited my fear to journey together - so it can be transformed into wholeness. I looked up and there was Kamyar, his eyes shining and we looked at each other and exchanged how similar our experiences had been in prayer in the Mosque. We walked out and I left my chador with a feeling of sadness, we went to eat as we realised that we were ravenous. Our bodies needed to be fed as our souls were satiated!!

One of the things I loved about our journey was its rhythm. We really tended our energy, knowing how to adjust our pace between being together, taking time on our own, eating, being in conversation, writing, being in the moment of life just happening, etc. We didn't seek anything – we simply sensed, intuited, moved as a field, delighted in moments of complete unexpectedness. An aspect of this was creating enough safe space within our selves, between us and with our external context. So, deciding to stay in a comfortable hotel, Kamyar speaking Pharsee, our friendship and practice of checking in and checking out each day, eating good food, being with friends and family – these were our anchor points. This all created a sense of belonging and placing that then allowed the expectant to arise – and more to the point allowed us to see it and participate in making it happen.

Again I lived this pattern of balance - our field was deeply committed to travelling together. Both Kamyar and I were really present to our collective space yet we also gave each other just enough space to be detached from each other, so that gestures of giving to each other was like a little wrapped gift that we opened and delighted in. An example of a gift was my offering a reflection on the Iranian culture - like how people, who do not know each other, offer food to one another. This unconditional generosity that exists and how this opens one up to ones own unconditional love. This gave Kamyar the gift of seeing a new or renewed view of the people he comes from, seeing how this lives in him and that this is the currency that he really lives from, the economy that he creates around him and the immense potential that lies in this if he worked with it more consciously. This gave me such an embodied experience of how I want to commit to live life – to journey – to be in deep relationship with fellow journeyers, committed yet with just enough space to let the commitment be a bringer of gifts of unexpected delight and not duty or an expected result that fits in a frame of right and wrong. Is this the field beyond right and wrong that Rumi spoke about? Was I living it? Is this what being Sufi means?





Back to our full day in Esfahan, after an afternoon schlaffen, we decided to go to the river and see if it was flowing. Kamyar was filled with sadness when we reached it and saw that this huge river was completely dry – absolutely dry. The Si o se pol Bridge, a magnificent bridge spanning the river is of course still there and we walked across it. The river is dry because the water flow is being controlled and redirected in the summer months. We were told that it does flow again in the winter. Kamyar shared with me that one of the things that is happening in Iran is that the water source is drying up. Why? What does this symbolise for Iran - are the emotions and feelings of the country dammed up - or have they just gone underground? Walking back later that evening (after our pizza!) – we got our answer to this as we passed the river and felt the water flowing underground – the coolness and damp that

greeted us told us that all is well –just a wee bit hidden for now. Just like back home at Axladitsa I thought. What are these waters hiding and are we as humanity being called to listen more intently to the invisible to hear the flow we must take?

After such an amazing day and as I was falling asleep, I wondered what the next day would be like? We woke up early again, met for breakfast with all the other hotel guests and checked in, (just the two of us, we thought inviting all the guests to a Circle would have been too much). Our attention was being called to the two mountains that seemed to hold particular orienting points for the city. We also felt the call to go to the Armenian Orthodox Church that had been closed the night before – we felt the need to get back there.



So we decided to start with the Church. A beautiful old mud brick building with a dome that made it look just like a Mosque but without the Minarets, but with a bell tower. Interesting to see the similarity in the motifs of the feminine (the dome) and the masculine (bell tower/Minarets). There were beautiful frescoes inside the church – and although of the Eastern Orthodox faith – it felt more like a Catholic Church inside, especially the alter are as it was not hidden behind a screen, like other Orthodox Churches. There was one fresco that clearly showed the three levels of Christianity – the heavenly level, with Angels, Saints, God,

Jesus and Mary, the earthly level, showing humans, animals, life happening as it does daily, and finally Hell, the place where demons, the Devil, torture and torment. It was interesting to see it so starkly and to see the archetypal images of all the levels. I noticed that one image was simply the flip side of the other – light and shadow dancing together – just different sides of the same coin. It was the portrayal of one being good and the other evil which left me feeling uncomfortable. This made me think of how much we fear the shadow and death in our modern world and how extreme we can become because of this fear that paradoxically releases the shadow



in a destructive way. For example, how does being too saintly, lead one to become the Devil? For if we do not allow the hungry side of ourselves free, depicted on the earthly level – do we not become over devouring and demonic?



After the Church, we caught a taxi to go to the first mountain which is where there is an ancient Zorastrian fire tower, which was lit for hundred of years, but which has been left to go out. There is one place in Iran, in the city of Yazd where the fire still burns. Zorastrianism was a fire worshipping faith – and with water, fire was seen to be part of ritual purity. Water and fire were viewed as the second and last primordial elements to have been created and that fire originated in water.

We caught a taxi – well – not really a taxi – someone driving home that is happy to stop and give you a lift for some money, a nice way to earn a little on one's way home. Our driver was a young man, named Shahram, who began speaking with Kamyar. Soon we realised that this was no ordinary young man, but an Iranian student doing his masters in Psychology. He began sharing that he was using a fusion of different approaches and methods, many of which his university professors did not understand or condone. The whole way to the mountain, this man talked non-stop with Kamyar translating to me from time to time. He had been working with various patients who through a psychosomatic approach had been healed in some really major illness such as Muscular Sclerosis. He was creating a method that includes meditation, chakras, psycho therapy. He was ecstatic to find people who understood

what he was saying and were not questioning it. He became more and more fired up as we came to the Fire Mountain – the power of being witnessed was giving him the ability to access clear language to describe his masters thesis. Isn't it amazing when we are listened to with no judgement and with pure witnessing, how easily we can access our knowing and wisdom?

At one point, just before we got there – he asked if he could come up the mountain with us, because this was so exciting for him. We invited him and as we walked up the mountain in the heat, he continuing to speak non-stop. Kamyar stayed with him - translating every once in a while. The fire tower had a very special and strong energy. It was not easy to tap into it, because our young taxi driver and his 'fire' was slightly taking over our space to sense. However, I did wonder, how he might be an icon, of Zorastranism. I imagined that perhaps this had been a practice where people were allowed to access their knowing, their own inner fire and create from there for the greater good. Of course, this was just me, watching and listening to this young man and letting my fantasy go. I have no proof that this is indeed what the practice of Zorastrianism was like. At one point in our conversation, we were invited to participate in a meditation, that required us to go out onto the rocks and face the other mountain and meditate for about 5 minutes. I loved feeling the rocks on my bare feet and I loved sitting on one mountain and facing the other. I also loved the way the other people who were visiting the fire tower were looking at us and probably thinking, "Oh no here are the hippies" - or whatever the Iranian equivalent is! The meditation was not earth moving, but it helped to still my mind and once again feel that deep ancientness of this land - the deep feminine that it was. More importantly, as I was thinking that these two mountains must create a magnetic field between them - our new friend spoke this. He spoke of how these are important points in the City and that they are one of the reasons why this city is so special. Again, I thought of my own land, Athens in particular and how this too, is a city with these hills that are connected -Acropolis, Philopappou, Lycavitos. Also Rome with its seven hills. Somehow, the ancient ones seemed to know how to find powerful places where the geomancy of the land could work with the humans to release our wisdom and power in a generative way. How do we become more aware of this again -



and allow this to help us find the new way forward and stop ourselves from thinking we alone can solve our problems. And what if our problems are just this – that we have forgotten to include the Earth we live on?

Later with Kamyar, over some lunch we began to see that over the past couple of days, we have been travelling a constellation of places – the Source point at the Mosque, the river, the Church, the Mountains. We felt that there must be a code to this that made Esfahan special – what was it? I thought of the carpet – ancient pattern, modern application.

After our lunch, we found ourselves in a little café that we had discovered the night before, which was in the Armenian section of the city, right next to the Church again. This place was special – you could just feel it. The specialness came from the man who owned it. A big fat beautiful man – that I am sure needed to be this fat because his heart was so big. Kamyar was mesmerised by him and wanted to know more about who he was and where he came from. I loved watching this special movement of coming into relationship. It was so what I know from my own homeland. It begins with the glances, and the smiles, a slight nod – and then a waiting for timing. Oh – the timing is so important. For if you

miss the timing – that could be it – no relationship ever, or you start on the wrong foot and it could take the rest of your lifetime to put it right. But if you hit the mark right - it could open a whole new world for you. This way of coming into relationship is so of the east – the eastern way of navigating life. You do not mess with this - there is nothing more important. I watched Kamyar in this dance - and I watched the right timing when they began to talk. This man inspired Kamyar, because he was seeing an aspect of his future in him. What was this? The man was an architect, who after working in different parts of Iran and on big projects, decided to settle here and set up this little coffee shop. He was definitely a lover of beauty, because the place was so intimately designed and put together with each piece being placed with love. He loved music and he played us old songs that broke Kamyar's heart open and awoke a big smile in me, for although different to my grandfathers rebetiko songs - I could hear the same eastern tone that makes one's heart wail with longing and also feel deep peace. So back to Kamyar's future - was this an image of what Kamyar's soul was calling him to. A small place – just an ordinary coffee shop, where extraordinary things could happen. I felt Iran smile seductively at my friend and thought – you have no chance mate – She wants you back!



ney, a Story, a Life

Again after a rest in the afternoon – why do we not do this everyday – it is so what the body wants to do - we took a taxi to the other mountain, the one we had been facing when meditating on the fire mountain. This one was really high and it could be walked but it felt right to take the cable car with all the hundreds of other people who were having their Friday off (in the Muslim tradition, Friday is a day of rest). We stood in the cable car queue and I got many looks from women and men and children who liked my bright pink fan, as it was hot and I needed to make air. It was a novelty for people to see a foreigner, especially European as there really are not many in Iran. It actually was really nice that way as there was tourist trade aimed at the foreigner seeking the new but finding what they know. It feels like Iran is Iranian. I kept seeing how important it is to keep ones roots in tact and that although we strive for this international element, how often do we dilute our own essence to become what is right for the other. It is kind of a legitimised prostitution, no? It is so interesting that we cannot seem to create a diversity point and instead we create common ground – but somehow lose what is really unique in us – to meet in the common ground. Hardly common!!

So back to the cable car – finally it was our turn and we went in with a sweet couple, husband and wife and the cable car took off. It was actually kind of scary, because it was seriously high and the cable car juttered the whole way up. The mountain was beautiful – another big sleeping giant – gorgeous ochre colour - with jagged edges - he had a kind of punk hair style. The mountain was a really family place and as we stepped out of the cable car I was amazed by the mixture of the wild nature of the mountain and the completely humanised aspect of it. We walked to the tea house, where we found one of these beautiful sitting beds – took our shoes off and tucked our feet under us and ordered tea from the sweetest and happiest soul. I bought corn on the cob too - love it. We had another deep conversation about relationships and the mature masculine. We kept talking about this even when we moved and sat on a park bench with a lovely Iranian woman who offered us Iranian Cheetos. A long conversation as to why men do not attach in the same way as women and how they have to be reminded by us women that this is important. It was quite a revelation to me. Needless to say, I felt slightly annoyed as this made it feel that we women

had to do so much work to keep a relationship going and what was the gene that men had that allowed them to not attach or even become aware that it is important to be connected, care, discover, etc. Was it only when they wanted some 'pretty ass' that their need for 'attachment' was activated? I loved these conversations during our time, it was like we opened a window or door into another world and we would be gone for hours before realising where we were. We realised the time and decided to head back down the mountain with the cable car, which was even more frightening because now you had the gravitational pull. We bought popcorn, and searched for a taxi and finally someone picked us up It felt like all of Esfahan had been at the mountain as we drove back into the city in the traffic. We got back to our lovely hotel - and went into the magical caravanserai garden - again slipping into another time zone. We were tired - so looked more at the people around us, than talked.







Translating

We woke up to our final day in Esfahan – we were going to leave on the 3:30 p. m. bus back to Tehran. So, we had a leisurely breakfast and check in and then we went to check out of our room. I had to buy some gifts for family and we ended up shopping in the hotel because there were some really nice shops and because it was a government run hotel, it had good prices. In no time, we had beautiful gifts for the entire family.

It was now time to return to the carpet shop!! We sat on one of the sofa's in the hotel and counted our money. Could I really afford to buy a carpet – even the little one? Kamyar was certain I could – and me, so easily convinced, said OK, let's go and see. Entering the shop again, I felt the same magical feeling. This was so much more than a carpet shop. This time an older man was there and we looked at the carpets. There were only three with this fused design of kilim and carpet – the one on the wall, which was stunning, the small square one which was also stunning and a new one smaller than the one on the wall but not as nice. We asked the prices again. I sat there looking at the one on the wall and the little square one, wondering if I could buy either,

but feeling if I did not get one I would regret it for the rest of my life. Kamyar whispered to me, "Get the big wall – it is amazing! 'I know', I thought to myself, but how do I justify it? And then it hit me -I am buying a story here that someone has written about an ancient civilisation that has a message to tell us for now - and I am thinking of justifying it? What the hell was wrong with me? I turned to Kamyar and said – can we barter a little, see if they will give us a better price? Kamyar immediately moved into action and another €100 was knocked off. This seemed fair so I said a definite yes! The story of the ancient civilisation is now in my family flat in Athens – Persia back in Greece – two ancient and rival civilisations meeting again in a new way. I was so happy to be bringing this story back with me that I did not ask if it needed to be packed properly for me to take it on the airplane. However, it was all taken care of and packaged. I was paying and I found myself saying to Kamyar, "I think we should sell these carpets in Greece – or at least into Europe through Greece." Kamyer translated this and the older man said that his son, who designed the carpets had gone to Greece to sense into this but had not found a way to do this. Kamyar and I knew that we needed to meet his son- and his father said he was in Tehran, where they had set up a gallery in a flat and we could meet him there tomorrow. We called him, made contact - and took his card. When timing strikes that is how quickly connection happens in Iran.



We stepped out of the shop with the carpet beautifully packaged and as we had done throughout the trip, we walked to a restaurant. This one was designed as a traditional house with the sofa beds again – and we sat there and ordered good food. I loved this place and I could have stayed there all day. Oh I loved these beds – how I would have loved to have some for the family flat back in Athens but

I do not think I could have easily packaged these. After another great meal – this time of young fresh veal, it was time to leave so we returned to the hotel one last time to pick up our bags and head to the bus station. We got there in time and found the spot where our bus would leave and we waited for the bus to Tehran to be called. We waited and waited and waited. There were others there and as one



does in Iran, we struck up a conversation with those around us. This time it was with a just retired school teacher, who informed us that she had complained to the bus company for this delay. Finally at 4:00 p. m. our bus was called and we boarded and left. It was a comfortable trip back, and we hardly talked but slept most of the way – digesting our Esfahan experience. As we neared Tehran, we began to talk, about the carpet, meeting the young man who designs them the next day, connection with Greece, hosting a learning journey with others to Iran.

We began to dream of a trip that invited people to find the pattern of their soul through the pattern in a carpet. Imagine, people coming to Iran – flying into Esfahan, meeting the designer, going to their factory to see how the wool is dyed and then feeling the pattern of the city, then leaving to go and meet

the nomads who weave the carpets and finally to return to Esfahan to choose the carpet that shows the pattern of your soul. We got so excited with this and were so pleased with ourselves. We wondered what else would be possible with the carpets? Perhaps selling them through Greece and who would run the shop? We saw, my eldest sister Anna doing this. We arrived in Tehran, elated that we had seen something we could feel inside us. We arrived back to Kamyar's family flat, filled to the brim with the experience of Esfahan. We cooked sausages and made tea and felt we were on the right track. Kamyar looked different to me, but I did not say anything - he looked like someone who had found a missing part that he had been searching for years. He was a bit stunned and not quite fully in the physical – but also very present.





Transforming

Our last two days before leaving and I could feel us turning the corner but not just yet, I told myself. You are still here and there is more life to be lived. We wanted to meet the young carpet designer so we arranged to meet him at his gallery flat, which turned out to be utterly beautiful. We sat with tea and this man – this young, ancient man who was so filled with the love of the history that he designs and weaves into his carpets. His does not sell carpets – no - he sells patterns of the ancient code in a new way so that we can see it. Both Kamyar

and I immediately felt the resonance between the three of us and this made us easily speak of wanting to bring people on a learning journey. He was so excited. It did not take a long visit - it was in our hands - and we said we would be back to continue this relationship. Again, if timing strikes, and the resonance is there that is how quickly relationships are established in Iran. Ah - a memory passed through my heart - of how easy life could be if we just return to this and let go of all these bloody rules that Europeans love. We had an ancient code in my homeland called Philotimo - it is about the honour of relationship- we do not need rules when you have this one law. I could feel this here on this land - philotimo was still alive - and I prayed that my land would know it again.

We ended up again at a restaurant – I just loved the



grilled chicken and rice – give it to me everyday!! The restaurant, not far from the family flat is called Sufi. We digested the meal and the meeting with the young carpet designer in an afternoon rest as we had a big family gathering to attend that night at Uncle Ismail's. Aydin dropped by in the afternoon and so did Kamyar's cousin Arezoo, who brought all sort of goodies for me and wanted a tarot reading. So whilst the men talked, we women sat at the table and I pulled cards for this beautiful young woman who has quite a life story. It was sweet and fun and her appreciation was so genuine. Everyone left and we got ready for the party.

After a long taxi ride of being stuck in Tehran traffic and Kamyar huffing and puffing about how much he does not like Tehran's traffics, we came to the northern neighbourhoods of Tehran which are the wealthier areas of the city. You could tell from the shops and upon arriving at Kamyar's uncle apartment building, you could see we were on the right side of the City. We entered a big, beautiful flat where Kamyar's two young cousins, Solele and Hanane greeted us with Uncle Ismail and also his wife. We thought we were late but no one else was there. We were served tea, dates, fruit. Then the door bell began to ring and various family members poured through the door - Cousins, Aunts, Uncles, Children of Cousins, Wives of Cousins, Husbands of Cousins - how many were there? Beautiful people. Some were traditional wearing the chador, with others being completely the opposite with short skirts and skimpy tops. Big hearted, warm people, who shyly looked at me. Women shook my hand and kissed me, some men shook my hand, some older men just slightly bowed in front of me and did not look at me in the eyes. Well certainly when I was not looking, because my whole body burned all night with the looks and glances I was getting. Who was I and what was I to their Kamyar? A woman only as friend! Was he really telling the truth? I held my own - held my centre and embraced each and everyone of them into my heart as they are beautiful people who love Kamyar - or Kamy as they called him. I loved taking the family photo, I got the giggles doing it because of the chaos that was involved. I loved seeing Kamyar in the fold of his family with everyone wanting to talk with him, catch up with him, asking him what was happening in his life? I was touched by Kamyar's watching over me and I could see that he knew I was absolutely fine and that I could hold my own in the midst of all this family. At one point I looked up and remembered my family gatherings and I could feel tears coming to my eyes as I realised how many of my uncles, aunts, cousins have passed away and I so wanted Kamyar to cherish what he was in, because it does not last forever. The night was fabulous and as it started, it ended and we found ourselves in a taxi, going home and giggling at all the furtive glances I had received all night and agreed that these were good and beautiful people that Kamyar should be proud of coming from.



The next day - my last day as my flight was at midnight, we took our time getting up, having coffee with our new coffee maker from Esfahan and just checking in. We decided to go to the Palace in Tehran and the market that was close by. We found ourselves in the Tehran Bazaar, which is a huge covered market with thousands of people and I realised I wanted to buy one more thing for myself - some silver earrings. So we slowly made our way to the part of the market where the jewellers were and we found a beautiful pair of earing with King Naser A-ddin Shah who's palace we were going to see. I love these earrings and now wear them often as they are so eastern and elegant. We walked to the Palace just round the corner and bought our tickets and laughed at the sign at the ticket booth, the misaligned summit or something like that. I got the idea of what they were trying to say and I think it was brave, although the English was funny and just showed how stupid our world has become. The palace was beautiful and showed the amazing discrepancy between the royalty and the people - but look at the United Kingdom - it is still happening there, but no one seems to mind. I wonder what it will take? Kamyar told me the story of the King. He seemed quite a Casanova, spending more time

in the Harem than governing the country. Poor man – another victim to the 'powers below'.

We met with Yasser and Aydin for lunch and again I sighed at their beauty. I cannot describe how dignified and honourable these men are. They give me hope in our humanity that we will make it. We went to a beautiful restaurant and I ate an incredible dish of chicken cooked in a sauce of crushed pomegranate - it was amazing!! I just loved watching these three friends gently speak and connect - no need for them to saunter and posture - no need for them to hide their feminine and be in their masculine. The careful way in which they listened and showed respect, made me catch my breath and again that amazing dance between men and women and not sexual - more soulful. I loved our afternoon together, although we were tired and as the afternoon moved on I could feel Kamyar's restlessness emerge. He was edgy and cranky as I could feel him slowly letting go and feeling the loss of having been in a really powerful field with me and his homeland. He needed space to let himself be in the letting go and being with others right now was taxing him.



So we returned home to the safe haven of the family flat and rested. Then we came together for one final time before preparing to leave for the airport. We still had a few hours so we made tea and fell into the comfort of being in a circle where we simply passed the piece between us, allowing us to speak the appreciation of our time together and to harvest out whatever we needed to. Slowly we came back into ourselves, feeling the comfort of our field and the deep reverence of what we had lived these day. We knew that we had been profoundly touched by this trip, this land, our friendship and that perhaps this trip had profoundly touched each of so that we would never again be the same.



The time came to get in the taxi and drive to the airport. We hardly spoke to one another on the one-hour drive there. And our goodbye was very quick. And then I was on my own having to check in – fight to keep my carpet, which of course I did – and in no time I was on my plane and it was taxying down the runaway and in flight to Istanbul.

I felt a tug on my heart as the plane took off and I did my cross as I do on every flight. I thanked this land for its mystery and beauty. I thanked Kamyar for his friendship and love. I thanked myself for my courage. I thanked life for its impulse.

