

PURIFICATION

Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

Welcome everybody again. I hope you are all still fresh after the Pathfinding debriefing and will be able to switch to our next topic: Purification. I love being here, in front of this beautiful, invisible audience and I truly hope my talk on purification will inspire you to jump in a holy river or something like that. Well as Puran said, I am Umtul and, you may have noticed, I am Dutch. I run a little Sufi Way Circle where I live on the coast, North-West of Amsterdam. Within walking distance there is a huge area of wild nature, with steep blond dunes, forestry slopes and lovely lakes in the valleys. Walking in nature has always helped me to get purified of excessive thoughts, stress and fixations. This year was a trying one for me, with a removal, a beloved sister who died and a few other stressful events. When we were to define our topic for a chilla, for me Purification came up straight away. Maybe because of this years stress, but also because chillas I have done in the past often had a purifying aspect, which helped me a lot in finding a more balanced way of life.

What is purification

Purification is a means of bringing the attention back to one's heart, to our essential nature. Sufi Inayat Khan has said: "When the stream of love flows in its full strength, it purifies all that stands in its way, as the Ganges - according to the teaching of the ancients - purifies all those who plunge into its sacred waters." The Stream of Love which purifies all. But what if that stream is full of branches, leaves and withered plants? The stream itself is strong and magnificent but will need some cleaning up from time to time. Inayat Khan speaks of the breath as a means of purification and suggested we should do breathing exercises as a daily practice. This is done in many other spiritual traditions as well. It seems natural to me because breath connects us to the One, it is the One who breathes through us and therefore gives life to all. This theme, the opening of the heart will be a leading theme of my talk. If we are able to keep an open heart, that will be the ultimate purification.

Why do we need purification?

In addition to our daily practices it is important however to find from time to time a moment to re-centre ourselves completely, to cleanse ourselves from selfishness, too much self-preoccupation, too much business, too much mental activity, in short, to reset our whole "system" in order to get reconnected to our heart. We sometimes need to take a break to look deep

inside ourselves to determine what we need to be purified of and then to give ourselves the experiences we need to become released from that. We accumulate tension whether we know it or not. Life is very hectic, we run from one errand to another and from one appointment to the next, and we often find ourselves in busy traffic. There is, however another aspect: in our daily life much is demanded of our minds. These demands can be so strong that almost nothing else appears to exist besides our mental activity. The amount of information we have to deal with and absorb is enormous. Never in history have we needed to make as many choices as we do today, and never have we had to absorb as much information. We see through our modern media all that happens throughout the world. All of that creates tension, whether we are conscious of it or not.

Then there are the stresses of an emotional nature, resulting from our interactions with other people, our feelings of dissatisfaction about our life and so on. I am not suggesting that this chilla can provide a solution to very deep seated emotional or mental tensions, but we all know the profound value of taking time to refresh ourselves, to deeply relax and to connect again to our Source. When we re-emerge after such a cleansing it is indeed like we have shed some obstructions in our Flow of Life and are ready to re-engage with our daily life with a fresh perspective.

Purifications through Ceremonies and Rituals

Peoples, who live a more natural life compared to us "Westerners", are accustomed to doing purification/healing rituals regularly. Of course much of tribal life has disappeared in its pure form, but some tribes still observe some of the customs of their ancestors. They are/were so much more connected to their environment and the condition of the Earth that they consider purification as an absolute necessity. They used for instance sweat lodges, hot stone cellars, solitary retreats in nature, immersing themselves in holy rivers etc. The beauty of some of these old ceremonies strikes me. Take for instance the ceremony of the Native American hot cellars: the entrance is built very low, one has to crawl into it, so one starts one's purification ritual by showing humility, which is an important aspect of purification of the self. Hours and hours are spent in that very hot and very dark space, sweating out not just the accumulated poisons of one's own mind and body, but those of the collective as well. Coming out is like a rebirth from the dark and the heat into the Light. Indians plunge into the Ganges, Tibetans walk around a holy mountain. Every natural living tribe has its own specific ritual for purification and healing. What strikes me as very beautiful again: most indigenous people do not just purify for their own sake, but blessings are asked for their families, the whole of humanity, all of life and for the Earth as well. More people praying for the Earth would keep a certain balance and possibly save it from destruction. Now here lies a challenge for us as well. Let us pray together with the natural

tribes all over the earth for the wellbeing of our planet and in doing so let us open our heart to each other.

The Five Elements

Purification through the elements Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether has been used throughout human history. The elements are the components out of which Nature is made. Sufi Inayat Khan has said the following about them: "Our physical body is constituted of the five chief elements, which compose the whole universe as well (...). There are germs and impurities that could be purified by the five elements (...). As there is a need of sun and water for plants to grow, so there is a need of the five elements for a person to keep in perfect health."

- **Earth** represents the roots of our bodily life; it is what the substance of our body is made of. We are also rendered back into the Earth after our life has passed. Our body will then become food for plants, trees and micro-organisms so that we in our turn will feed the Earth, as an offering of thankfulness for the life we have been given. However even now whilst we are still alive we can surrender ourselves to Earth. We can experience a primordial state when we cover ourselves with her mud or bathe in it and in doing so we will benefit from being nourished by her minerals and from purification through her disinfectant qualities. Symbolically it is like returning to the womb for renewal.
- **Water** is another life-giving element. All life starts in water and it fertilizes the earth so that plants and trees can grow. Water is also a great purifying force. Where it flows it takes with it all that is polluting our environment. We all know the power rain has, how it can freeze us, rinse us, drain us and refresh us. How often don't we feel truly refreshed after having taken a plunge in natural water, or after we have drunk pure and clear water to flush our system.

Thich Nhat Hanh uses the image of a droplet of water that finds itself in a cloud. In response to its increasing weight as other droplets join with it, it falls to the Earth as rain, it loses its identity and becomes part of a stream, a river. One day the river empties itself into the ocean and loses its identity too, but one thing remains the same: water is always water. Therefore it is a symbol to us for the Oneness of Being and an open heart.

- **Fire**, the fire of the sun is a symbol of the One life, the burning Presence of reality. Fire is represented in the body by its warmth. Fire is also a transformative force; it clears away the old and makes space for new life to emerge. Gazing into the flames of a fire invites us to tell stories and listen to poetry. Since the beginning of time stories have

Living Sufism Presentation: 'Purification' - 25th November, 2018

woven the world together for the people gathered together around a fire. When love is awakened in a human being we can see the eyes burning with love. Such a person is like a torch, touching our hearts deeply.

- **Air** is the primal force that keeps us alive. Breath, wind and the holy word are related to each other through the shared experience of Spirit. In the beginning was the word, and the word used air as a means of transport. We can use air by breathing deeply into the belly. What a relaxing and purifying effect this has, a deep healing wave rinsing your body and taking all impurities out of your system. Standing in the wind outside during a storm makes you feel humble and gives you a sense of self-loss, an entry-point to your heart.

There is a prayer in a Native American tribe, the Dineh:

“The One called Holy Wind
And Wind stands within us
The same One turns that one
That walks about,
It turns this earth,
It turns water, everything
It alone is our Holy One.
Really only it is our prayer.”

- **Ether** is as the atmosphere of our world, all around us. It is seen by the mystics of all times as that element that purifies all, because it connects all the elements. It is the realm of intuitions, dreams and creativity. It is the atmosphere of the Spirit, and of our collective knowledge.

The importance of attitude

An important aspect of mental purification is the refining and changing of attitude. I think that is a very important way into our heart. It is what we call Adab in Sufism. Be polite, have an Adab of not hurting anyone, of not speaking ill about another person, of being patient, of being humble and grateful; of showing respect to one another, to other forms of creation, animals, trees, plants, the environment, our Earth. Most importantly, be able to forgive all, including yourself. As Inayat Khan says: “The best principle is to forget “others” and to forget “ourselves” and to set our minds upon accumulating all that what is good and beautiful.” Pir Elias Amidon talks about: “Doing the beautiful” and Rumi says famously: “Let the beauty we love be what we do.”

I spoke recently to an Iranian lady who took care of her husband for nine years before he passed away. Friends felt sorry for her but she did not

feel sorry for herself. She was happy to do what she needed to do and felt blessed she was given the opportunity. She said: "He became like an angel the more the illness progressed" and she felt blessed by witnessing this process. Moreover, she felt spiritually enriched by the care-taking. She could see her situation from different angles including a spiritual perspective and was not just caught by fact that she could not leave the house for nine years. This lady is an example of loving-kindness. She was able to let go of her own needs and show true compassion and love as an attitude in her life.

Conclusion

I have talked about the importance of releasing mental, emotional and physical impurities in our lives and how we can reach that through rituals and ceremonies and by the use of the five elements and a change of attitude . This month's chilla will consist of creating a ceremony for yourself . Hopefully you will be able to refresh your stream of Life and Love with a purification ceremony that will meet your specific needs.

Purification ceremony chilla

1. Create a ceremony of Purification using the five elements to support your intent. It is not essential that you use all the five elements. It is your choice whether you do so or not.
2. I make some suggestions for possible activities with each element (see below) but in the end it is up to you to create the right ceremony for you and your circumstances. Be creative but purposeful. The chilla is not about doing many interesting activities but about doing what is right for you in order to be purified.
3. Remember that the power of this chilla will depend on the energy and commitment and attitude that you bring to it.
4. The ceremony can be done at any time during the day or night. It is recommended that you set aside about five hours for it, but in the end it is up to you how much time you devote to this.

The day before the ceremony

1. Consider deeply what you want to be purified from. Be specific in this.
2. Create your ceremony and write down the structure and any creative inspirations that accompany it.
3. Prepare everything that you will need for the ceremony, including poems, prayers and music.
4. Support your experience by eating lightly or even fasting. Drink plenty of water. Refrain from unnecessary talking.

The day or night of the ceremony

1. Begin by doing purification breaths (see website).

Living Sufism Presentation: 'Purification' - 25th November, 2018

2. Do your ceremony.
3. Come back slowly to your normal daily life.
4. Contemplate about your experience and write about it or express it in any other way suitable to you.

Suggestions for activities

You are free to choose from the following or make up your own similar activities, based on the elements.

Earth

Take a mud bath or a mud packing (see website). Stay in the bath or keep the packing for as long as twenty minutes, but no longer and focus on how the power of the earth is purifying you.

Water

Take a very long shower or bath, rinsing of the earth and consciously experiencing the flow of water on your body. Focus on how the power of water is purifying you.

Fire

Make a fire or light one or more candles. Watch the flame(s). Burn something personal and precious to you. Focus on how releasing this personal possession is a purification for you.

Air

Go outside and breathe deep, take a walk if you can. Do your breathing exercises. Focus on how the power of air is purifying you.

Ether

Pray and/or meditate on being purified and end the ceremony with a blessing or prayer.

Thank you for having had the patience for listening to me. You can find information about breathing exercises, the chilla description and how to make a mud bath or packing on sufiway.org, section Living Sufism. I wish you from the depth of my heart, a great and effective purifying chilla.

(For the website only)

The five purification breaths of Sufi Inayat Khan

Do each section five times.

1. Element earth: breathe in through the nose and out through the nose, while being aware of the element earth and the colour yellow.

Living Sufism Presentation: 'Purification' - 25th November, 2018

2. Element Water: breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, being aware of the element water and the colour green.
3. Element fire: breathe in through the mouth and out through the nose, being aware of the element fire and the colour red.
4. Element air: breathe in through the mouth and out through the mouth, being aware of the element air and the colour blue.
5. Element ether: breathe as it comes naturally, being aware of the element ether and the colour mauve, greyish purple.

Thich Nhat Hanh, breathing exercise: Breathing in, I calm my body and mind, Breathing out, I smile, Dwelling in the present moment. This is the only moment.

About the mud bath or packing:

Unfortunately it is mid winter, so most of us will have to create a mud bath inside. You could go to a Spa, or Wellness Centre as well, if you find that comfortable. In health food stores or on the internet you can buy all kinds of earth/mud (f.i. death sea mud) for your bath/packing. It is advised to buy mud, especially meant for this purpose, it will be clean and not clutter your drainage. You can find recipes for mixing your mud as well with f.i. some grinded oat flakes, natural oil and for a nice scent some ethereal oil. For the packing you may need assistance to spread it all over your body, wrap yourself in a towel, sheet and/or blanket and lay down comfortably and warm. **It is advised not do the bath or wrapping longer then 20 minutes.**

Sources:

Purification, Sufi Inayat khan, Volume IV

The Fruitful Darkness, Joan Halifax

Free Medicine, Pir Elias Amidon