

Elements of Mastery: "Be Ye Songs of Glory"

By Halima Sussman

One of a series of articles by Dance mentors exploring the art, craft and spiritual practice of leading the Dances of Universal Peace.

The Walks and Dances of Universal Peace are an exquisite vehicle for the transformative spiritual awakening to our true nature. In the Dances we overcome isolation and the illusion of our separate individual states, and join together in the experience of our shared humanity. All people have words and expressions for love, compassion, peace, and joy. The Walks and Dances offer us a medium to experience and open to these kind of qualities that are, in reality, always present. We tune ourselves through rhythm, breath, heart awakening, and embodiment to the reality of Love, Harmony, and Beauty.

"The dance is the way of Life; the dance is the sway of Life. What Life gives may be expressed with body, heart, and soul to the glory of God and the elevation of humankind, leading therein to ecstasy and self realization. Verily, this is the sacred dance." (Murshid SAM, Intro to Spiritual Dancing)

A quick look at the world news reveals a major gap between the values of love and happiness that we all want in our lives, and our actual collective human condition.

"When mankind, terrorized by conflict and faced with the ruin of civilization, when the power of wealth has dominated justice and the concept of fiction-money leading to utter destruction: when the Holy Spirit, driven ever further away on its path of ascension has again reached zenith, to the undoing of so much near and dear to us - let us, in spite of what occurs before our eyes invoke that same Divine Spirit through love and beauty, that we may restore order and balance to humanity." (Murshid SAM, Intro to Spiritual Dancing)

In this light, The Walks and Dances of Universal Peace are an active, positive, and powerful agent of change and transformation. As dance leaders, we cultivate and develop the capacity to become conduits for such transformative experience. But the question arises: What are some of the ways we cultivate and develop this capacity?

"The willingness and ability to attune and surrender to the blessing transmitted through the Dances is the single most important aspect of dance leading. Ultimately, most mentors regard this as the ability to efface one's ego-personality in order to let grace flow through. It cannot be over emphasized that when working with the Dances 'externally' they will have 'internal' effects." (Elements of Mastery: Attunement - Tassawuri, Fana, Effacement)

In this way, the Dances, and leading the Dances are a spiritual practice. We quicken to the God-given and God-sent qualities that are manifest in all life, including our own human nature. In leading a dance circle, it serves the group if we are able to let the energy flow through freely. When we activate our breath and hearts, when we open to compassion, mercy and love, strength, courage, joy, and peace, these energies move through us and can open in us. These energies also awaken the stuff that has accumulated within; all the impressions, and 'rust' on the heart. In the way

that water moves everything loose in its path, smoothing all the rough places it passes over, so too the vibrations of love, light and sound have this effect. This is akin to purification, and a natural part of transformation.

Some of the dance movements and body prayers expressed in the Dances and Walks invite an emptying and filling of the heart. Descriptions that sometimes accompany these movements may include "sweeping out the chambers of your heart", or "polishing the mirror of your heart". Here we are loosening our hold on impressions and scar tissue that obscure the clear, responsive and relaxed nature of the awakened heart.

We could also call this process the cultivation of effacement, the capacity to surrender our own ego, and our own sense of self-importance. Sufis call this act of surrender "fana", which is a similar state to what Buddhists call "cultivating emptiness". In this state of fana, or emptiness, a dance leader becomes a vessel, receptive to the ever-present flow of blessing, Attuned to this stream of blessing, the dance leader focalizes an atmosphere that becomes a transformative medium for all. This atmosphere begins within the dance leader, and its outward form unfolds naturally.

It helps to have teachers, guides and mentors that we can tune into. Attuning to someone we respect who is further developed and more experienced in this line becomes a great resource. The relationship charges and accelerates our process of growth. Not only do we grow our own awareness and experience, but we can see through our mentors' eyes as well. The creative dynamic of the teacher/student relationship serves the development of an expanded awareness for both.

This attunement and tuning invites us to recognize our place in the living stream of blessing, When Murshid Sam first asked some of his students to lead dances, he told them "just imagine that I am with you, walking alongside you, holding your hand. Tune into my energy and my atmosphere, because when you lead dances you represent me and I am present." This living stream of blessing is a primary resource for every dance leader no matter what their level of experience. When we are leading the Walks or a Dance of Universal Peace we can tune ourselves to the living presence of Murshid SAM, to those who have walked in his footsteps, and "ultimately, to the heart of God." We are One Body. "I am the Vine and Ye are the branches thereof."

"In a sacred apprenticeship relationship, self-discipline, consistency, willing surrender and service are the key themes and prove the existence of genuine growth, attainment and ultimately the ability to carry the magnetic-love current called transmission or lineage in various traditions. ... The "source" in the area of the Dances and Walks, is ultimately the heart of God. The essential nexus or connection to it [this heart] is the being of Murshid Samuel L. Lewis and his successors in this line. There is no transmission in this area without a genuine connection to this being, ...albeit his personality...is only a doorway to an attunement with his ongoing, living presence." (Saadi Shakur Chishti (Neil Douglas-Klotz), "The Dances and Sacred Transmission: Nurturing Growth for the Coming Generations." 2002 paper revised June 2009.

Thus every dance experience becomes an opportunity to tune to love, compassion, peace, joy, and the awakening of heart. As Dance leaders, we are a part of this living lineage and precious transmission stream.

I am struck sometimes that the light from the stars we see at night has travelled thousands of years through space and darkness until this very moment when we open our eyes, look, and see. What a mystery! We see it now, but it started out so very far away and long ago. The enduring, continuing traveling vibration of light and sound gives me hope for the future and motivation for the present. Vibrations of light and sound do not stop. They continue on till they are absorbed or transformed into another form of energy. The Aramaic word *Shemaya* (often translated as meaning Heaven) and the Hebrew word *Shem* (the sacred name/sound) both refer to the shimmering vibrations of light and sound. When we radiate light, love, joy, and peace, it makes the world a better place. This is how we create Heaven on Earth.

"When doctrines divide and isms turn man against man, without speech, without silence, let us demonstrate. Let these demonstrations manifest everywhere. Not what we think or say but what we do shall avail. May we therefore bear the torch of holiness and make of our bodies temples of sacred worship. Verily, (Hu)man(ity) is the noblest work of God." (Murshid SAM, Intro to Spiritual Dancing)

Opening ourselves spiritually, and shining "our" light becomes a way to contribute to the happiness of all beings. When we generate and demonstrate peace, love and joy, we contribute to a positive future, and move towards the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty on earth.

May All Being Be Well, May all Beings be Happy!



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