

The spiritual power of dance

(The Huffington Post, 2011)

Each of us is a moving center, a space of divine mystery. And though we spend most of our time on the surface in the daily details of ordinary existence, most of us hunger to connect to this space within, to break through to bliss, to be swept away into something bigger than us.

As a young dancer, I made the transition from the world of steps and structures to the world of transformation and trance by exposure to live drumming. The beats, the patterns, the rhythms kept calling me deeper and deeper into my dance.

Being young, wild and free, it didn't dawn on me that in order to go into deep ecstatic places, I would have to be willing to transform absolutely everything that got in my way. That included every form of inertia: the physical inertia of tight and stressed muscles; the emotional baggage of depressed, repressed feelings; the mental baggage of dogmas, attitudes and philosophies. In other words, I'd have to let it all go -- everything.

At the time, I was teaching movement to tens of thousands of people and, in them, I began to witness my own body/spirit split. Between the head and feet of any given person is a billion miles of unexplored wilderness. I yearned to know what was going on in that wilderness, not only in me, but in everyone else as well.

And so, movement became both my medicine and my meditation. Having found and healed myself in its wild embrace, I became a mapmaker for others to follow, but not in my footsteps, in their own. Many of us are looking for a beat, something solid and rooted where we can take refuge and begin to explore the fluidity of being alive, to investigate why we often feel stuck, numb, spaced-out, tense, inert, and unable to stand up or sit down or unscramble the screens that reflect our collective insanity.

The question I ask myself and everyone else is, "Do you have the discipline to be a free spirit?" Can we be free of all that binds and bends us into a shape of consciousness that has nothing to do with who we are from moment to moment, from breath to breath?

Dance is the fastest, most direct route to the truth -- not some big truth that belongs to everybody, but the get down and personal kind, the what's-happening-in-me-right-now kind of truth. We dance to reclaim our brilliant ability to disappear in something bigger, something safe, a space without a critic or a judge or an analyst.

We dance to fall in love with the spirit in all things, to wipe out memory or transform it into moves that nobody else can make because they didn't live it. We dance to hook up to the true genius lurking behind all the bullshit -- to seek refuge in our originality and our power to reinvent ourselves; to shed the past, forget the future and fall into the moment feet first. Remember being fifteen, possessed by the beat, by the thrill of music pumping loud enough to drown out everything you'd ever known?

The beat is a lover that never disappoints and, like all lovers, it demands 100% surrender. It has the power to seduce moves we couldn't dream. It grabs us by the belly, turns us inside out and leaves us abruptly begging for more. We love beats that move faster than we can think, beats that drive us ever deeper inside, that rock our worlds, break down walls and make us sweat our prayers. Prayer is moving. Prayer is

offering our bones back to the dance. Prayer is letting go of everything that impedes our inner silence. God is the dance and the dance is the way to freedom and freedom is our holy work.

We dance to survive, and the beat offers a yellow brick road to make it through the chaos that is the tempo of our times. We dance to shed skins, tear off masks, crack molds, and experience the breakdown -- the shattering of borders between body, heart and mind, between genders and generations, between nations and nomads. We are the transitional generation.

This is our dance.