

Attuning to World Traditions

by Radha Tereska Buko



When Murshid Samuel L. Lewis began bringing forth Dances of Universal Peace he drew them through roots planted in the soil he had cultivated in his lifetime of spiritual study. He had sought out the most respected teachers (among them Hazrat Inayat Khan, his Zen teacher Senzaki, and his Hindu teacher Papa Ram Dass), who offered transmissions that were in turn deeply rooted in their lineages. He created Dances honoring only traditions he had directly experienced. He worked with fewer than 50 Dances. Three decades later, Dances of Universal Peace circles around the world are celebrating those original Dances and creating new ones honoring indigenous traditions from around the world. How can the sensitive and sincere Dance leader respectfully represent this cornucopia of spiritual traditions?

The most direct and clear method of understanding a culture or path not one's own is through total immersion. Matthew Fox has said that the way to honor an indigenous people is to ask them to teach you. Murshid's peace plan to eat, dance, and pray together guides us in the same direction. Such an approach requires a commitment of time, energy and often travel. Living with humility amongst a cultural group for even six months will infuse a person with a unique flavor of that culture. This is evidenced by the experiences of Peace Corps volunteers and students studying abroad who return more able to see the world through the eyes of an other. This direct method is ideal yet rarely obtained in a busy and complexly committed life.

There is a "back door" which can take a person deeper in the attunement process to different traditions. As strange as this may sound at first, a viable beginning is to enter more deeply one's own root tradition. It can not be overstated that one cannot effectively take someone else to a place one has not experienced. This place is authenticity: of path, of roots, of spiritual community, of heritage, of ancestry, of holding on in spite of hardships, of honoring the full tapestry of one's story line. The destination is not arrived at overnight. It begins seven generations back (metaphorically speaking). Feeling one's own roots and connection allows one to transfer the depth of understanding to another tradition not as "other" but "same under a different name".

In this age of information, there is an abundance of reading material in books, periodicals, and the World Wide Web. Selective discretion is advised in evaluating source materials. Remember that the written word is twice removed from an experience: first through the descriptive process and second by its representation with the lines and curves of print on paper. In addition, words in translation are further removed from the direct cultural experience. Supplement your reading with live experiences. Communities around the world are increasingly cross-cultural. In one's home community, seek opportunities to be with other cultures and traditions. Be open to the possibility of a spiritual mentor not limited to members of the clergy. Anyone in any walk of life may have the elements one needs. It is observed that when the student is ready, a teacher appears. Ask questions. Be open. Listen with "big ears."

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These words of Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, preserved in *The Unity of Religious Ideals*, brought me to this work and continue to guide me:

The idea that you are different and I am different, your religion is different and my religion is different, your belief is different and my belief is different – that will not unite, that will only divide humanity. Those who, with the excuse of their great faith in their own religion, hurt the feeling of another and divide humanity, whose Source and Goal is the same, abuse religion, whatever be their faith. The Message, whenever, at whatever period it came to the world, did not come to a certain section of humanity, it did not come to raise only some few people who perhaps accepted the faith, the Message, or a particular organized church. No, all these things came afterwards. The rain does not fall in a certain land only; the sun does not shine upon a certain country only. All that is from God is for all souls. If they are worthy, they deserve it; it is their reward; if they are unworthy, they are the more entitled to it. Blessing is for every soul; for every soul, whatever be his faith or belief, belongs to God.