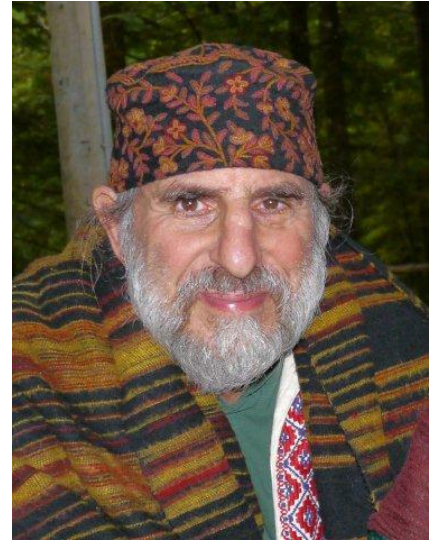


Dancing the Heart Awake

By Murshid Abraham Sussman

This article continues our Elements of Mastery column in which we explore the art, craft and spiritual practice of Dance leading and mentoring. Mentors are invited to submit their reflections on this topic to the Guidance Council.

As a young wanderer in 1969, I first met my spiritual teacher, Sufi Murshid Samuel Lewis, dancing in Precita Park in San Francisco. I realized quickly that life was taking me on an extraordinary adventure, and that my primary task was simply to be open, to listen, and to welcome the awesome blessings that were pouring forth from this God-realized dervish. I embraced the dances he shared with us as opportunities for ecstasy and as pathways to higher consciousness. I loved the community drawn together around this unpredictable, funny and wise elder. Adorned in our colorful robes, I experienced beauty in each and all of the dancers, and spiritually, I felt I was arriving home.



Now, 43 years later, I feel the same yearning for ecstasy and the genuine awakening of my heart. Whether I am leading a dance, playing music for a dance, or dancing a dance, I recognize that with every step, and every breath, the transformative potential of this sacred practice is powerful beyond limits. The essential ingredients for this heart awakening are the same for me as for every other dancer: to be sincere in my devotion, to be present and attuned to the group energy, and to give myself fully to the sacred phrase.

In considering ecstasy and devotion, we are talking about the inner life, what Hazrat Inayat Khan calls the realm of "vibrations". Heart-awakening means just that: the awakening of our hearts from the stupor of isolation, disconnection, and fear, to become alive in the magnetism of spiritual realization. HIK also teaches us that the essential ailment of the human condition, from which all other illnesses and imbalances arise, is a "coldness of heart". Thus, our warm embrace of the Beloved, in whatever form, brings healing to our hearts and lives. For the inner life, our resources are silence, and breath, and attunement to the masters and mystics that have come before us.

From this perspective, what makes the Dances of Universal Peace sacred dance and spiritual practice is that they have the power to magnetize our

inner life, and to awaken our heart. Outwardly, there may be joy in our whirling, and pleasure in seeing the light in another, but the true measure of our experience is whether we are drawn a little closer to the illumination of divine realization. An awakened heart is contagious, and when a group practices together, the warmth and light are powerful agents of transformation.

With this view of the Dances and Walks as spiritual practice, I look for certain qualities in masterful leadership of the Dances. These include:

1) **Solar Radiance** - being positive in one's offering, confident in one's direct link to one's teachers and lineage teachings.

2) **Embodiment** - giving one's embodied focus to the practice.

"Left foot, right foot", the Dances call us from distractions of mindmesh into the vibrancy of embodied presence.

3) **Relax** into calm abiding, which naturally encourages everyone in the circle to be relaxed and engaged.

4) **Fana** - being effaced of one's own personality, devoting oneself to the practice, and tuning to the needs of the group. As leaders, we ought not take ourselves too seriously. Love inspires us all to open; the narcissism of self-importance closes us down.

These are group practices and while the leader needs to inspire the group, s/he also needs to trust that the practice will naturally do the work of opening the group. Sometimes leaders may be very magnetic and skillful in what they offer, but they fail to surrender to the practice of the Dance. The group then remains so dependent on the leader and his or her leadership that their experience of their own practice may be held back. Optimally, a leader both inspires a group, and liberates the group to awaken fully to the practice.

The training of Dance Leaders mostly involves our own training in spiritual practice. The elements of mastery described above are not learned from a book. They involve our own experience, as Dance Leaders, of the awakening, from within, of our own hearts. As Rumi says: **"Close the language door. Open the love window,"** These qualities are not easily "taught". But may best be "caught" from mentors and other allies, who have developed them through spiritual practice. This relationship is the foundation of our model of Leadership Training, which looks to the relationship between Mentors and Mentees as a vehicle of transmission, hand to hand, and heart to heart, of these elements of Mastery.

The Universal Peace that is essential to our true nature dwells in the purified heart, and the Dances are natural vehicles for purifying the heart. In the

Dances, we are called to transcend our egotism, and realize our place in the interdependence of the circle. We shed the isolation of our individualistic perspective and we practice blending, and harmonizing with the whole. It is in this harmonizing that the heart is softened, and purified. The unity of the circle becomes a felt experience, not simply a mental concept, but an embodied experience fully realized.

The Dances of Universal Peace are governed by Pluto, planet of collective awakening, and they may be a language whose time has truly arrived, on the level of planetary transformation. In 2012, what history may be teaching us, post 9/11, in the Arab Spring, and in social revolutions everywhere, is that the era of domination and the tyranny of the rule of fear may be yielding to the power of collective group awakening based on inner freedom.

Leaders are called to serve. The awakening of humanity is everyone's collective responsibility. ***"You may think that this movement has to do with singing and dancing, but really it is all about world peace."*** says Samuel Lewis. May the Dances of Universal Peace serve this planetary transformation! As Murshid Sam said: ***" I want to go to a peace demonstration where the demonstrators actually demonstrate peace."***

This is our gift to share with the world.

Musician, Guitarist, Mentor in the Dances of Universal Peace and Murshid in the Sufi Ruhaniat International, Abraham Sussman is an original student of Murshid Samuel Lewis, Abraham has travelled the world with his spouse Halima leading Dances of Universal Peace in Russia, New Zealand, South America and many other places. Abraham and Halima have recorded numerous cds of their music and together created the music for the Foundation Dance and Walk Manual. A clinical psychotherapist, Abraham makes his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts where he and Halima focalize a very active Sufi community, Sama Sangha.

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