

Attuning to the Buddhist Tradition

by *Anahata Iradah*



As a long term student of Vipassana meditation and more recently of Tibetan practice, I have found the following principles to be the most helpful in attuning to the leading of Dances inspired by the Buddhist tradition.

Taking Refuge

In some form it is helpful and respectful to take refuge in the three jewels, or the triple gem. These jewels pertain to the Buddha (representing the Enlightened Ones), the Dharma (the teachings on the path of Enlightenment) and the Sangha (the community of practitioners). This activity is already present in Dances like Kwan Zeon where some of the movements themselves represent taking refuge. However, when this isn't so, at the opening of a Buddhist inspired Dance the whole group could place their hands together at the crown chakra and say, "I take refuge in the Buddha and the Enlightened Ones," hands together at the throat chakra "I take refuge in the Dharma and the teachings," hands together at the heart center "I take refuge in the Sangha, the community of practitioners." This should be done three times. At the close of a Dance it is appropriate to dedicate any merit that may have been generated through the sincere practice for the benefit of all beings.

Body Awareness

In Vipassana meditation there are two primary respected techniques of 'scanning' the feeling body and of 'noting' the body sensations moment by moment. These techniques develop strong equanimity, our ability to be with our inner experience 'just as it is.' We send a message to the 'deep mind' of our willingness to be with ourselves, just the way we are. This cultivates an open spaciousness and loving acceptance that are tools for purifying consciousness. Even minimal awareness within produces maximal attunement without.

A Fluid Sense of Self/self

While we are in relative existence a sense of self is bound to arise. This is not to be feared, it is part of being human. Our goal, however, is to manifest a 'fluid self' so that we may merge with our higher Self or Buddha nature. A simple focus on the raising and lowering of arms is a perfect mechanism for energy awareness and the teaching of 'emptiness.' A sense of shimmering emptiness arises when we are in contact with 'impermanence,' and impermanence (that is, the ever changing wave of life) may be colored any flavor we wish.

Metta, Karuna, Mudita, Upekkha

The Four Immeasurables (Brahma Viharas) are the states of consciousness that the Buddha equated with the nobility of being a skillful human being. We abide in these abodes when we cultivate 'Metta,' which is loving kindness, or human friendliness, 'Karuna,' which is compassion, 'Mudita,' which is our sympathetic joy, our ability to share another's happiness and joy, and 'Upekkha,' which is our equanimity, our ability to be centered and calm in the midst of any experience.

We can infuse our Dance, our simple, meditative movement, with these qualities. Each moment of the Dance can be experienced so that every movement is taken as an opportunity to develop the Brahma Viharas, where each glance, each touch of the hand and tone of the voice could be used to send and receive loving kindness and compassion. No wonder Murshid S.A.M. offered us so many two-note Dances. The gifts present in such elegant simplicity are

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as precious as a humble, foot-centered walking meditation that has taken so many beings to full and complete enlightenment. Use the time in the Dance to amplify the Metta, our human friendliness. This does not have to be loud or even noticeable, but it will be felt in every cell of the subtle body. This is what is known in Buddhism as purifying consciousness, bringing about the pure land. The Tibetan lamas say that if we only have time for one prayer each day, it is to recite the four immeasurables.

Mindfulness

Every action is an opportunity for Empowerment, every thought, word or action can be infused with mindfulness. That is why the genius of the Dances is so clear and evident. They are a bridge of perfection between sitting meditation and traditional spiritual practices, and the complex array of human interactions. Our Dances remind me of the Japanese Tea Ceremony, which offers participants an activity between straight 'sitting' and the complexities of human life. The simple rules of the ceremony allow each guest to bring mindfulness to the table.

Our Dances, too, are not so complex that we lose touch with the flow of awareness, nor so detached and austere that we are not in contact with our fellow human beings. We can bring conscious awareness into each breath and yet have a big impact on the energy of the circle. Being mindful means bringing consciousness to all of our sense gates, which include seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, thinking and feeling with heightened awareness. We can choose a subset of these and specifically focus on the breath, or our hearing, or seeing, or we can bring general heightened awareness to all our sense gates, as we feel our feet making contact with the earth; as the thinking mind generates thoughts; as the breath rises and passes away; and as each human being enters our awareness we offer compassion.

The Dances are an endless opportunity for Mindfulness and for abiding in equanimity, neither pushing away any aspect of experience nor craving something that isn't there. What a gift Murshid S.A.M. gave us with the Dances and Walking Meditations where the tenets of all the faith traditions can be brought into the circle. Buddhism is no exception, where the three Jewels are always present. We take refuge in our teachers and the sources of inspiration that guide our life. The circle is the reality of our inter-connectedness and the raft on which we travel across the ocean of suffering into liberation.

Eh Ma Ho - How Wonderful!