



Steps toward Peace through Spiritual Dance and Walk

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The unpublished writings of Dances of Universal Peace founder Samuel L. Lewis present a wealth of direction, inspiration and advice on cultivating the attitude and skills necessary to be a "peace dancer." The following selection draws from his diaries and unpublished lessons for students on the intention behind the Dances, qualities needed for this work and preferences for training in the basic elements of Dance and Walking Meditation. Reference letters at the end of each selection refer to papers listed at the end of this article.

What Does Dance Do?

What does dance do for us? First and foremost, it inculcates the sense of rhythm and enhances our response to rhythm. This is really a response to life. It makes us more living, which is to say, more spiritual. It brings out beauty of form and movement, and envelopes our personalities in the enjoyment of them. It takes us beyond ourselves, bringing an initial taste of the state of non-being, which is really a balm for the soul. Whether one follows classical, romantic, popular, exotic, Oriental, Occidental or personal models, there is a modicum of intellectual significance added to the dance, so that body, mind and heart can unite.

No doubt we can learn from the Orient and in return can teach Asiatics. If we need anything from India, it is the spirit, particularly that spirit which underlies the sacred dances of that country. We have our peculiar physique, our traditions, our forms. We need abandon nothing. We do not protest against accepted styles. We want to employ everything we can on the pathways toward God realization. [SD, cir. 1940.]

A Universal Spiritual Revival

We look for a universal spiritual-aesthetic revival. The cultivation of ecstasy and attainment of superconsciousness are steps on the way. We are here to complete our humanity, not to avoid it. Therefore we must hold before ourselves the ideal of the holiness of humanity and the sacredness of the body. Institutions, themes, forms and ideas are inferior to humanity, for humanity was created by God, and these things were made by humanity. As humanity grows in understanding, in consideration and in compassion, spiritual art will unfold itself accordingly. Humanity's heart awakening must come first.

A warning note should be expressed here. If the dance or any art be cultivated for psychic or magical purposes, the world will not evolve, it will regress. On the other hand, if there is the hoped-for spiritual awakening, then all the arts will reach a higher status. Perhaps then the magic, the psychic powers, the unknown forces and faculties will appear as if quite natural. With the coming of the Sovereignty of God in the human heart, many marvels will be added. [SD, cir. 1940.]

The Spiritual and the Practical

When we separate the spiritual from the "real," the "practical," the "beautiful," we build a concept which of itself is not spiritual. Our thought of God is not divinity. It is one of the many thoughts of our mind and is less than we. Korzybski has pointed out that the word p-e-n-c-i-l is not a writing tool, it is a word. The word G-o-d is not the Divine Being, nor is the thought we hold the ultimate reality. Spirituality is beyond word and thought.

The dance revolution proposed goes deeper. It does not abrogate skill, but would offer encouragement to every type of artist. Even burlesque may remain. It does not say of the

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ballet that its principles are contrary to physiological mechanics. It does not believe that the study and performance of ancient dances should be detached from art and joined to anthropology. All forms and methods would be utilized. Only a sincere feeling for beauty would be demanded.

In and around Hollywood, there is at least one teacher [Ruth St. Denis] whose methods are based upon cardiac mechanics and heart-concentration. Her pupils learn, more or less consciously, to invoke psychic forces. They imbibe philosophy from the dance itself. Their spiritual faculties unfold without anything being said of them. At the same time, they emphasize interpretive rather than program dancing. To them, the right interpretive dance offers full scope to the will of the performer and gives her or him every opportunity for self-expression. [SD, cir. 1940.]

Folk Art and Peace

There have been societies in the many places to preserve the folk arts. The harm done to them by this diabolic war [World War II] can never be measured. The folk dances have a direct appeal. Their spirit belongs to the people. They illustrate the dance as an index to human character in accordance with Havelock Ellis' famous question, "What do you dance?" [in *The Dance of Life*, 1929]. When civilization and order are restored, as restored they must be, let us remember that humanity does not live by bread alone. The human spirit needs sustenance. The peacemakers should do their utmost to encourage these arts. [SD, cir. 1940.]

Dance and Human Education

We protest against stilted, dynamical geometric patterns which appear so delightful in Hollywood films [in the 20's and 30's]. They turn performers into automata. Even communist Russia has not dehumanized the individual dancer so much as Hollywood has. Those who battle fearlessly against gearing a human to a machine, say to a belt in an automobile factory, should also protest these group-robot dances. Bear in mind the words of Jesus: "Fear not them that torture the body but rather them that torture the soul with hell-fire."

Many stage dances have elements of the group-unit which may become the basis of the new aesthetic and new civilization. Dane Rudhyar has been a sort of modern prophet in this respect. The group-unit may have the fellow-feeling and attunement that might be expected of members of an orchestra. When there is a common spirit in a group, the same psychic currents touch all. There will be a common zest for life. Group silences and concentrations will prove most valuable if we wish to face the new age with sanity.

The art and music appreciation courses in public schools have done something to awaken ideals and ideas in the young. We must not stop there. It is not enough to awaken only the practical or "human" qualities among the young. We must foster genius. Just glance at all the attempted suicides among the young! Ask the psychologists how many more have pondered this fatal step. We must arise beyond the period of crass materialism to a broader outlook. [SD, cir. 1940.]

The Dance, Nervous Energy and Types of Ecstasy

Physical movement alone is sterile and that which does not involve emotion may be excluded from art. The march may be called a dance; it is a rhythmical, physical movement of the body, usually to the accompaniment of music and having a distinct purpose. The march does not demand grace or beauty; in it Yang [the positive element] dominates over Yin [the receptive]. The goose-step is an extreme example.

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The Goose-Step involves a maximum of Yang to practically the complete exclusion of Yin. Metaphysically, the Goose-Step and War are one. The Goose-Step is a war march, as much or more than the savage dance is a war dance. It makes use of force without stint or qualification. It involves destructive psychic as well as physical forces. To abolish war we must abolish war-like movements.

Indeed, all bodily movements involve psychic forces which, while operating on the physical plane, are partly magnetic and partly mental. It may be said that they are mental in point of origin and biophysical or bio-electromagnetic in operation. They move along the nervous network and form an aura around it. When the body moves, this aura is extended in the direction of movement, always ahead of the physical center of gravity. It may be said that there is a physical center of gravity in or near the heart, and a psychic center of gravity determined dynamically by the direction of movement. The former is more or less static, the latter dynamic even in repose. For in repose, the psychic field of force may be extended according to the condition of thought and the quality of breath. The understanding of this will help to explain several kinds of metaphysical phenomena, commonly ascribed to spirit communication, etc.

Use and misuse of psychic energy tend toward stimulation or fatigue. When stimulation is under control there is ease and joy. It is a part of life to increase that joy even to the degree of ecstasy. But before the nature of ecstasy can be understood, one must learn the relation of mind to body and of heart to both mind and body. Otherwise, there will be that debilitating false ecstasy which is nothing but psychic inebriation. [SD, cir. 1940.]

Monkey and Cat Methods of Training

Nasik India- [The "fruit swami"] explained to me the two methods of spiritual training, called the "monkey method" and the "cat method." In the monkey method, the baby holds onto the mother and wherever the mother goes the mother carries the baby. In the cat method, the cat picks up the kitten and teaches it to walk. So the cat tries to make its offspring an adult as soon as it can, and the monkey tries to keep its offspring an infant for as long as it can. So you have two types of spiritual training: those who lean on the teacher to do everything and those who teach their disciples how to become adults. He told me I was on the cat method [Diaries, 1956.]

On the Teaching "Battery"

It is a mistake to assume there is any "teacher." The teacher is the positive pole of a cell and as the pupil or pupils-the negative pole-show more aptitude, the electromagnetic field of the cell increases and knowledge comes through the teacher which would have otherwise been impossible.

In the real samadhi, one has not only union-with-God but with all humanity; when one is helping others, one is helping oneself, and when one is really helping oneself, one is helping others. [Diaries, 1967.]

On Initiating the Spiritual Walks

One has begun teaching spirituality through the Walk. This method was blessed by the late Miss Ruth St. Denis, a very spiritual dancing teacher who knew how to receive inspiration from the very space itself.

The Walk developed in two directions: extentionally and intentionally. In the extentional walk, disciples learned to climb hills and mountains and walk long distances. But then the

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question arose: if [sacred phrases] could be used to help one walk long distances, climb mountains and work without fatigue, couldn't they be used to help humanity in its greater education, purification and development? So now we use many of the sacred phrases in moral development and psychic purification....

By applying the divine qualities to humanity, one helps to remove the evils, the shortcomings, the impediments and all the grosser aspects of being. A sacred phrase is better than a chastisement.... The next phase seems to be coming-that these methods can be extended to deal with psychological problems. [Diaries, 1970.]

Group Training in the Walk

Through the teachings on Walk and many of the Dances, followers of different religions may benefit through stress on their particular ideal. All persons do not have to walk or behave similarly; or as is taught, "unity, not uniformity". In performing the Walks, the grade of development is not necessarily measured by the practice in group. The individual benefits more from his or her own practices, but the community is benefited by group undertakings.

There is no absolute measurement. Some disciples have had enlightenment experiences through the Walk, either through their own realizations or through the Grace that can manifest. The prayer that we can see God through Grace, Glory, Wisdom, Joy and Peace becomes a reality. [FS, 1970.]

Developing Capacity through Breath and Heart

Every breath raises or lowers the electrical state of the body, which can be demonstrated and proven scientifically. If this power is increased without augmenting the capacity many times more, which is done by meditation-the same thing will happen and does happen to the human body as occurs to the electrical System - a fuse blows out and you have trouble....

Capacity is increased by meditation and, in general, by heart action, by maintaining the rhythm of the heartbeat, by feeling the consciousness in the heart, by directing all activity from the center to the circumference and by maintaining unity in feeling, thought and action. It is connected with inspiration. [THSB.]

Divine Mother and Divine Breath

The Mother of the World has two aspects. The first is the accommodation for the planets, which is the same as the formation of the ovary with its functions. As the fecundated mother does not menstruate, there is the second aspect of the mother with mammary glands, as Hathor of the Egyptians. Hathor literally means "House of Light." So the Divine Mother after fecundation gave birth to the earth planet and this she nourishes with breath, prana. Therefore Divine Mother and Divine Breath are identified.

So long as one sees from one's limited point of view one is held in bondage by one's individual breath, thought and emotions. Use of sacred phrases-mantras and wasifas - destroy the hard-making power in the subconscious self or ego, which in enlightened souls becomes identified with the world-self, in other words with the Divine Mother, the Goddess Kali. Looking at life from this point of view, one constructs the Universal Sense in one's spiritual development. Only then can one be called a sage. [THSB]

[References: SD - "Spiritual Dancing" (unpublished manuscript, written about 1940); Diary entries are included in the autobiographical collection Sufi Vision and Initiation; FS - "Fana-fi-Sheikh" (unpublished paper for initiates); THSB - "Two Hundred and One Suras on Breath" (unpublished paper); TDM - papers published as part of the Teachers Dance Manual].