

How to Dance: Eleven Keys

by Wali Ali Meyer from
Spiritual Dance and Walk by Samuel Lewis

1. **LISTEN.** Do not simply recite the sacred phrase. Listen to the other voices. Listen to the person directing the dance. When you begin to listen, your voice will automatically begin to harmonize. Find the center of the sound.
2. **FEEL.** The dances are designed to take us more and more into the universe of feeling. Stay with your feeling. If you go into the world of thoughts, don't judge yourself; simply bring your concentration back to feeling. The heart center, found in the middle of the chest, is the natural place to begin.
3. **CONCENTRATE ON THE SACRED PHRASE.** The sacred phrase, sometimes referred as Wazifa or Mantra, centers the dance. We all say this together. The Grace of Allah can operate through the sacred phrase if we are willing to receive it, to let it be. With each repetition feel the phrase touching your being in a deeper and deeper way.
4. **DON'T BE AFRAID TO STOP THE DANCE.** This is for dance leaders, if the dance gets out of control, or just isn't making it, it is much better to stop and begin anew. Learning is much more important than just doing.

5. **SIMPLE, RHYTHMIC MUSIC.** This can be a great aid. Guitar and drum are especially helpful. Musicians should emphatically resist going off on their own. The sacred phrase must be uppermost in their concentration. The music should accentuate the natural rhythm of the sacred phrase. Drummers especially bear this in mind. The simpler the better. Don't dominate the space. The sacred phrase should by far be the loudest sound. If you play your instrument correctly, no one will even notice you. Isn't that wonderful?
6. **MOVE TOGETHER.** Restrain the exuberant impulse to make an individual expression. You will be amazed how much higher/deeper the dances are when you use that same energy to harmonize with the others in the circle. Feel your body fully. Then gradually or suddenly become the whole circle.
7. **WATCH YOUR BREATH.** Breath is life. Breath is movement. Voice is breath. Let breath breathe. Return to awareness of breath in silence between dances. Notice the subtle changes in breath brought about by each dance.
8. **ECSTASY.** These dances can lead to states of ecstasy. Joyously invigorating! In dances where you are brought to the center of the circle, especially soar. But soar with your whole being. Taste all the planes at the same time. If your feet are grounded on the earth then your head can be in the heavens.
9. **DEVOTION.** This is a grace. To willingly submit ourselves to Allah/God in Whom we move and live and have our being.

Hypocrisy may be the only sin. How wonderful it is when we actually feel like bowing in humility before the eternal truth. These dances can be worship: the celebration of the Divine Presence. The Sufis call this Akhlaq Allah – acting as if in the Presence of Allah.

10. **AMIN (ah-meen).** This means, "So be it." We say this at the conclusion of many dances. (Other phrases such as the Sanskrit "Svaha" are also used). The important thing is not to say it, but to mean it, to affirm it with one's whole being.
11. **SILENCE.** There may be a silent meditation before the dance starts but if the participants are not experienced in this they may learn the meditation through dancing and also learn the dancing through meditation. As the sound and music of the dance stop, enter the silence. This is your opportunity to hear what has been created. In this silence one can absorb the qualities evoked during the dance. This is the most important part of the dance.

** All these words are in hope of your falling awake and finding the truth in your own self. You know your own experience better than anyone else. Be true to that. Don't let anyone pull the wool over your eyes; neither be swayed from what you know by the opinions of others. Always be willing to learn.*

Brief Glossary of Sacred Phrases Used in the Dances

These translations are offered to help in learning the dances. Your own realization of the phrase may transcend any verbal description.

CHRISTIAN

Ave Maria, Gratia Plena: (Latin) “Hail, Mary, full of Grace”
Mir Miru Mir: (Russian) “Peace, Peace on Earth”
Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est: (Latin) “Where compassion and love are, there God is also”
Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison: “Lord, have mercy; Christ have mercy”

ISLAMIC/ARABIC

As Salaam Aleikum, Waleikum as Salaam: “Peace be with you, with you be peace”
Bismillah er Rahman er Rahim: “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”
La Illaha Illa’llah Hu: “There is no God but God” or “There is no reality except Allah” (This is the most sacred phrase in Islam.)
Mohammed ar Rassoul Lillah: “Mohammed is the Prophet or Messenger of God”
Hu: “The non-manifest” The sound Sufis use to refer to the Absolute.
Ishq Allah mahbud liillah: “God is Love, Lover, and Beloved” or “God is all aspects of Love”
Alhamdulillah: “All praise to God in the Highest” or “Glory to God”
Allah ho akbar: “There is no power or might save in Allah” or “Peace is power”
Estaferallah: “Allah make pure” or “We take refuge in the purifying presence of Allah”
Ya hayy, ya haqq: “O Life, O Truth”
Zikr: “Remembrance” The practice of repeating aloud some form of the phrase LA ILLAHA ILLA’LAH.

HEBREW

Shema Yisrael, Adonoi Elohaynu, Adonoi Ehad: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Most sacred Hebrew phrase)
Shalom Aleichem: “Peace be with you”

Shabbat Shalom: “Sabbath greetings”

Heenay mahtov, umah nayeem, shevet aheem gam yahad: Psalm 133: “How wonderful it is for brothers and sisters to live together in peace”

BUDDHIST

Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, Bodhisvaha: “Gone, gone, gone beyond, everybody goes, Hail to the Goer”
Om Mane Padme Hum: “Hail to the Jewel in the heart of the Lotus”
Kwan Zeon Bosai (Quan Yin): She who hears the cries of the world and accords them Mercy and Compassion”

HINDU

Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram: “God who at once is Truth and Power, Impersonal and Personal, Victory to Thee, Victory to Thee”
Om Nama Shivaya: “Praise to God in the name of Shiva who is the Lord of the dance”
Hare Krishna: “Praise to the God of Love and Divine Ecstasy”
Gopala, Devaki Nandana: “Krishna in his incarnation as Cow-herd, a happy playful love-maker”

SIKH

Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam, Siri Wah (e) Guru: “There is but one God, Truth is God’s Name, Indescribably is God’s Wisdom”

ZOROASTRIAN

Ahura Mazda: “Indestructible Supreme God,” or “Lord of Wisdom”
Armaiti Anahita Atar Vayu: “Angels representing the four elements: earth, water, fire, air”



Welcome to Dances of Universal Peace

These multi-cultural dances use simple music, movements, and sacred phrases; no musical or dance experience is required. Participants join hands forming a circle, and a leader teaches each dance, often providing background history about the tradition and dance.

The movements and phrases include themes of peace, healing, and the celebration of life's great mystery, helping create a sense of peace and community while celebrating the underlying unity of spiritual traditions on Earth.

Dances of Universal Peace were started in the late 1960's by Samuel L. Lewis (1896-1971), a Sufi Murshid (teacher) and Rinzai Zen Master, who also studied in the mystical traditions of Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity. Lewis was deeply influenced by his contact and spiritual apprenticeship with two people: Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927), the Master who first brought the message of universal Sufism to the West in 1910, and Ruth St. Denis (1890-1968), a pioneer of the modern dance movement in America and Europe.

Lewis, then in his early 70's, began to envision and create the dances as a dynamic method to promote “Peace through the Arts.” From the early days and his original body of about 50 dances, the collection has grown to more than 400 dances which celebrate the sacred heart of religious traditions worldwide.

To locate dance leaders and events in your area, go to: www.dancesofuniversalpeace.org.