

Elements of Mastery: Leading with Power and Feeling

By Munir Peter Reynolds

In this e-newsletter series of articles by Dance mentors we will explore the art, craft and spiritual practice of Dance leading.

“It is the depth of thought that is powerful and sincerity of feeling which creates atmosphere.” - Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Bowl of Saki* for November 30

We often hear about the need for Dance leaders to cultivate “atmosphere” and to be true to the “attunement” of a particular dance. The Leader Guidelines point out that the primary quality the Leader transmits is “sacred atmosphere and attunement, which is impossible to systematize.” What does this really mean? And, if we understand what it means, how do we begin to attain to it?

Probably most of us have been in the presence of a teacher or Dance leader in whom we readily sense *power*. She is strong in herself, has found her own inner “Murshida”. It is not a quality that is strained or put on. We can really feel the power of the Source or spirit effortlessly flowing through her. You cannot really say that she behaves in this way or that, because she may not say very much in particular or do anything in a certain way. We just sense that power is there, and the Dances and Walks she leads have a weight or profundity to them. How is this power and atmosphere cultivated?

The words of Hazrat Inayat Khan cited above hold some clues. He says, *“It is the depth of thought that is powerful...”* Inayat Khan elsewhere writes about the importance to hold silence and speak when only we really have something to say because a deliberative statement will carry much more weight or power. We can first see that saying or doing something of substance requires deliberation.

We might begin by asking, before leading a Dance of Universal Peace or Walking practice, what kind of preparation have we made? We may practice the music and rehearse the movements, make sure we have the dance in our “body”, study the Dance write-up background, and so forth. We may all have our usual ways of preparing to bring material forward.

Inayat Khan’s aphorism above might ask “What would it mean to go further than this?” Have we deliberated, reflected deeply on the sacred phrase? Do we have a daily practice into which we can work with the phrase and have a direct personal experience of its transformative power? Have we considered the depth of the meaning of it, not only in our individual lives, but its relevance to the human condition? If we allow the sacred phrase and the Dance to unfold and “work on us” (rather than our “working on it”) then we’re becoming contemplative with it. It’s taking hold and our innate inner capacity to see the truth is rising up. It’s like turning the Dance or sacred phrase like a jewel and seeing its facets from all the different perspectives. We’re integrating it into our being. We may find ourselves thinking about it when we wake in the middle of the night, or perhaps capturing an insight about it that arises during our work day.

If we allow the Dance to “work on us”, then when we translate the sacred phrase or give an attunement to the Dance circle about it, our understanding flows from a completely different inner place. We are no longer just giving a script of what we always say, or what we learned the Dance is about, or presenting material from the Dance write up. Everyone in the Dance circle senses the *power* of thought that springs from practice, reflection and contemplation. The Leader

then does what is always appropriate in the moment to connect the Dance with the sacred phrase and the experience that is arising for everyone present.

To emphasize, we're not at all speaking here about trying to be powerful or to sound like we know something. That idea has to be completely left behind. Perhaps the Leader will actually say very little, but will communicate the power of the dance in subtle ways – through body movements and atmosphere. It can't be predicted! But, when it is there, all will know it.

Then, Hazrat Inayat Khan continues, ... *“(It is... sincerity of feeling which creates atmosphere.”* Many of us may be more comfortable using our minds in front of other people than we are displaying our feelings. Sincerity, being unguarded emotionally with others, creates an atmosphere in which others may feel safe enough or even inspired to do the same. If the Dance leader is unafraid to display whatever emotion may be moving freely within, that quality of honesty and beauty will permeate everyone's experience. This is “atmosphere”. When we consider the range of feeling that may arise in the Dance leader during a Dance, including joy, grief, humor, love, peace and ecstasy, it is important to consider how a simple *allowing* of this contributes to a more complete experience for everyone.

Of course, the ability to be emotionally honest and intimate with others is not a trait that comes easily in our society. We may have issues from our family of origin and conditioning in this area that we will have to look at. We can't “put on” sincerity of feeling. It has to be real and be the result of an unguarded stance. We can begin to work with this by examining our willingness to allow our emotions to be seen in the Dance circle. Am I repressing something that is welling up in me, and if so why? Seeing is the beginning of change, because the truth changes us.

Leading with Power and Feeling is really about having “all of us” available to lead, so that the power of contemplative thought and sincere feeling add their particular color and texture to what is happening. We are powerful and atmospheric beings when we discard all our wrong ideas about ourselves. In fact the Dances of Universal Peace could be said to be a group practice through which the power of the sacred phrase is made manifest in fullest potential, with the Dance leader as an instrument for this. In this way, the Dance leader opens a door within him/herself that others may pass through.

Seeing and feeling the wider road ahead and opening to the potential in ourselves is the essence of spiritual life, and certainly central to the art, craft and spiritual practice of leading the Dances of Universal Peace.

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