

TRANCE-DANCE - A PATH TO KNOWLEDGE

By Leo Rutherford

A woman dancer wrote to me of her experience at one of my workshops:

(Saturday) "I remember nothing of the trance dance and was quite surprised when my friend told me I had danced for a long time (over an hour). I thought it was two minutes. I now realise I was dancing the abuse out, no wonder my head was burning. No wonder I was excited. I knew the next day was going to be even more amazing.!"

(Sunday) "This day I will never forget for the rest of my life."
"Again in the dance I was gone but I remember coming to and someone had the rain stick near me. I thought if he comes any closer I'll have all his clothes off. Wow! Then this energy was buzzing through me and around me. I stood there thinking- I've got enough sexual energy to make love with every man in this room and start again. It was amazing and exciting. Mine to keep forever....."

Thank you all for making this possible. It was just beautiful, the drumming, the trust, the love and the warmth, the light and the fun. Everything was just as it should be."

Extracts from other letters...

Being able to express the inexpressable has changed the way I see myself. To have been able to make a noise, scream, rage, grieve, and recognise my goddess has been invaluable. Instead of victim I am now a person who gave it back where it belongs, finding the beauty they and I denied for so long in the process.

....my relationship with my parents has been revolutionised: it's really evolved into a more honest and appreciative state.

I feel generally much stronger and more in control of my life and have stopped smoking after 9 years! I also find myself choosing honesty over acceptance, which feels great...

I know I am part of the human race and more accepting of my foibles and neuroses and have to a large extent regained my incredible sense of humour having lost layers of shame.

Overall I still find trance-dance the best way for me to get to grips with my issues. It's the only within the dance that I feel fully alive and in my power. ...it's the dance that brings everything to life.

.... and to see the amazing courage and honesty that comes out and the transformations that take place.

I first encountered the trance dance in 1984 when I attended the European Association of Humanistic Psychology Conference which took place that year in Guildford, Surrey. One of the sessions was trance dancing with Dr Jacques Donnars (of Paris) and Professor Arnold Keyserling (Of Vienna). They needed music and I supplied them with my ghetto blaster and a tape of Olatunji's Drums of Passion.

What I experienced at the session was extraordinary. In quite a short time demure people who one might expect to be shy and inhibited were dancing with wild abandon. Professor Keyserling kept telling me to turn the music up louder and I remember wrestling with my machine to somehow extract a bit more volume. In those days I was somewhat more inhibited than I am now so I waited before trying the dance myself. Finally I dared to have a go. Jacques told me to keep my eyes closed and then he held my head firmly and turned it around a few times and then spun my whole body. Soon I found myself dancing on a world which tilted by about 30 degrees. When I began to fall someone would support me and I spun around in this crazy world dancing wildly until in a moment of

panic I blinked my eyes open. The spell was broken as I saw the dirty concrete floor and people's legs.

They called it Terpsichore Trance Therapy, or TTT for short. Terpsichore is the Greek Goddess of the dance. This experience made me determined to follow up and learn more and this I was able to do when one of Dr Donnars' trainees came to London and gave a workshop. I then began to experiment with the dance myself and learn more by trial and error.

My dancing life started in 1978 with Gabrielle Roth and I took part in many of her five day workshops at the Esalen Institute in California while I lived in San Francisco. In '82 I participated in her first ever five week long training course and this set me up with a deep connection to the dancing path. I taught her 'Five Rhythms' method as part of the work I set up on my return to England in 1983 and may well have been the first person to bring that wonderful work to these shores.

In the late 80's I worked with the trance dance, along with the Five Rhythms, and it helped me find an entryway into more passionate living and it brought about some transformative moments for workshop participants, yet I felt the need to know more and understand it at a deeper level. In 1992 I went to an International conference on trance and healing in Marrakech at which 250 people from 25 countries were present, including Dr David Akstein, the founder of TTT, and representatives from the Afro Brazilian traditions of Umbanda and Candomble which were his primary source inspirations. The local Gnawas, who come from the melding of West African and Middle Eastern Sufi traditions, were there too and I had my first experience of their night-long ceremony, the Derdeba, and of their extraordinary trance inducing music. The conference rekindled my enthusiasm for the whole field of trance dancing and so called 'spirit possession' as a path to accessing healing states of consciousness and experiences of hidden aspects of Self and the Universe. There were many sessions with Dr Donnars and his son Alain, at which I took the opportunity to enter the dance as many times as possible. There was a wonderful ritual with Carlos Buby of the Umbanda tradition from Sao Paulo, many other experiential sessions and numerous intellectual discussions on the meaning and value of these ancient ways.

I have worked consistently with the trance-dance since then, developing it, and have found it an amazingly powerful path. Relating it to Gabrielle's Five Rhythms, the two dance forms I mainly work with are like an extensions of the chaos and lyrical rhythms. This method, which I now call 'Firebird Trance-Dance', can move someone who has been stuck and take them into what they need to release easily and naturally and without the struggle through 'resistance' usually encountered when working in therapy mode; it can take someone to amazing places of cosmic light and laughter; it can liberate aspects of a person they didn't know existed and haven't encountered before.

Trance Dancing is almost as old as humanity, perhaps as much as 50,000 years old. Nothing could be further from some New Age new fangled cure-all fad-therapy. Dancing is natural, the beat of the drum is primal, stomping on the earth is basic to human beingness. The rhythm of the drum ? the heartbeat of Mother Earth ? guides the dancer deep within and takes her naturally and effortlessly from thinking to being, melting into oneness with existence. The deeper we connect with rhythm, the less inhibitions and self-concern we hold onto and the more we can enter the magic healing place of deep trance.

In Trance-Dance a seeming chaos reigns, yet in that chaos ? that 'allowing? ? a new sense of inner order comes to be. By inviting Spirit to dance within and through us we come to a place of ease with our true nature and experience the world through the lens of ecstasy, perceiving oneself as part of the Universal Playful Being enjoying The Cosmic Dance.

Trance-dance, as therapy, is totally non-judgemental and has no expectation of you. It is an invitation, an induction into the Spirit of the Dance, and it is The Goddess of the Dance that will do the rest. All you have to do is let yourself go fully into the rhythm..... There is a wonderful quote, I for-

get where from, which says “The lords of chaos hate rhythm”! That’s right - rhythm entrains the brainwaves and helps us into a state of consciousness where the natural laws of the Universe are more easily assimilable and where our own true natures come to the surface from beneath whatever repression we live under.

And, yes, we Westerners live under plenty of repression. We are like a nation of control freaks, terrified to let go and let the Spirit enter and take us where it will. After all, who knows where that may be? (Except, perhaps, with a lot of alcohol, but that is not at all the spirit we seek to invoke!) We are forever trying to impose our own conditions and say ‘yes but - I’ll change so long as it can be like this - within my known parameters - within my self-chosen limits’. But change means change - it means entering the unknown which is synonymous with chaos, and by definition that means the future is not known and cannot be controlled or bargained over! Sorry - Spirit will accept no pre-conditions and we cannot know who we will be after change, not until we get there.

African traditions, and many other indigenous cultures, have worked with ‘spirit possession’ for centuries. It sounds scary but if I reframe it as ‘ego dispossession’, then it is less scary and easier to comprehend. It means having the willingness to enter the unknown where Spirit and not the little ego-mind rules. In our religious history, ego control has got associated with ‘God’, and an ordered rational Universe full of repressed people has been labelled ‘godly’, while wild Dionysian letting go, natural uninhibited dancing and drumming, liberation into the realm of unbridled spirit, has got branded as evil and work of the ‘devil’. No wonder this is a hard culture to live in happily. To be a ‘normal’ person we have to bottle up so much of our self, our essence, our light and our truth.

In this day and age many workshops and courses are available to guide people to greater freedom from the belief systems which brought about the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual slavery of the past. Trance-Dancing is a way of reaching back to our ancient indigenous roots in order to help us present day people touch the place of true inner freedom, of passion for life fully lived, and to manifest the knowing of our right to make our own life choices.

Or as Native Americans might say – to ‘Dance Our Dreams Awake’.