

## **Spiritual and Cultural Exploration Through Dance**

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At the turn of the century, Isadora Duncan startled many Western viewers by her unorthodox burst into the dance scene in America and Europe with exhortations to all people, but especially to dancers, to tap one's inner resources of the solar plexis for performing expressive movement and for realizing a more cosmic spiritual expression of one's nature. Around 1926, in Paris, Malkovsky refused to allow his dancers to submit to the artificial restrictions imposed by ballet, and taught, instead that they must seek out their own inner rhythms which were impulses of the Divine working through them. About the same time, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, working out of Hollywood and New York, were pioneering concepts of dance as sacred, spiritual expressions derived from the inspiration of travels and dance studies in Asia and the Near East. Such ideas were revolutionary to western perceptions of rationality which can be traced back to Aristotle and later, the Age of Reason – i.e. left-brain perceptions.

To the people of Asia, Africa, Near East, Australia, and other Pacific Island, and to Nature Americans, and rare, intuitive western individuals, dance and movement have been acknowledged and used for centuries as vehicles to Divine energy, human transcendence, spiritual development and emotional, mental and physical health. Dance and movement can be a powerful way of integrating, synthesizing and expressing life and growth experiences.

“Furthermore, dance and movement systems throughout the world are also symbolic expressions of religions and cultures are, therefore, excellent ways to slip into cultural and religious perceptions, value constructs and understandings that appear different from our own.

Southern California has become a virtual living United Nations with the large influx of newcomers from foreign countries especially within the last ten years ...

With just a little courage and openness we can experience an amazing, exciting odyssey into our own sacred natures, and a new awareness of our bodies through movement experience. With dance and movement as our vehicles for learning, we can more clearly perceive the links between ourselves, the Divine and our own mental, emotional, and physical health. Equally important, movement systems other than our own can help us to understand and establish connections between ourselves, other people and other cultural values...

What better way to acquire cultural understanding of not only religious and philosophical frameworks, but also the inner, spiritual reality than through a 'right brain' activity such as moving and dancing. By exploring another culture's rhythmic system we can begin to adopt that rhythm into our own rhythmic repertoire and thereby acquire some understanding about how that cultural group sees, lives and believes.

Frequently, a big surprise that results from such exploration is the discovery that all enduring religions see truth, urge loving attitudes and behaviors and serve to help people grow evolve into more responsible, more caring, more self-affirming and consciously enlightened souls. In expanding our rhythmic repertoire, we allow ourselves to experience more fully a oneness with our fellow men, a

oneness that helps us identify our own inner sacredness as a beautiful manifestation of a greater, pervading, more universal, moving divinity that exists in all things.