

Planting Corn: A Dancer's Blessing

By Hilary Giovale, © 2009

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Recently I took a class on traditional agriculture. Part of the class was a journey to the Hopi reservation so we could become familiar with the Hopi method of planting corn. I was glimpsing a tradition that has sustained this culture for over 1000 years in an arid land. As we toiled in the intense Arizona sun, it was hot, uncomfortable, hard work.

The exquisite blessing came several days later as I reflected on the experience and started to understand that Hopi farming is not just about how deep to dig the hole or how many kernels of corn to sow. It's about honoring tradition, being in flow with the natural world, reciprocity, cooperation within your community, accepting and working with what is. And strange as it was, it felt familiar, because it reminded me so much of my journey with bellydance.

What motivates me to dance? I love to learn, and I've come to realize that dance, just like life, is the best teacher. Dance perpetuates its ancient traditions through connections (like my teacher Paulette, my students, other performers, or friends) who gently but firmly guide me to what I need to learn. They give me other perspectives, share what their teachers shared with them, and instruct me in the tradition of sisterhood as it has been passed down for millennia and is being lived today.

In dance I have learned another way to connect with the world, to resonate with the feminine energy that has long been suppressed on our planet. I feel connected to the ancient grandmothers I never knew who gathered wild foods or worked the soil, depended on natural rhythms for sustenance, gave awestruck thanks for their own fertility and the fertile Earth. I feel connected to the future daughters I will never meet, who will find new ways of healing the Earth, new ways of honoring themselves.

In dance I find reciprocity – a way to balance the outer and inner worlds. Dance has taught me to cultivate sanity in a way that transcends words and could never be matched by therapy. Through dance, I am able to value emotion and intuition in a world that mostly prizes logic. It shows me the value of different modalities for various situations: learning, teaching, strengthening, releasing. It has given me the gift of gratitude for my body, even when my body doesn't do what I want it to.

Dance has shown me the value of community. In Tribal Style dance, community is the glue that makes the dance possible. It requires a relinquishing of ego, an ability to sit in the back seat sometimes and an ability to step up and lead fearlessly sometimes. Through dance I've learned that community is precious and it's not always easy. Disagreements arise, misunderstandings happen, people get hurt. Sometimes communities have to dissolve and reshape themselves. Like the Hopi farmers, who had the grace to let outsiders in to their centuries-old tradition we too can be fluid, allowing our communities' evolution to suit new visions and needs.

Bellydance inspires me to dream. Sometimes I look at my situation and get frustrated with its limitations because my dreams aren't all happening yet. But dance is slowly teaching me to respect what is, to look forward to the possibilities with hope. In the modern world, few people would look at a dry sandy field as fertile ground. By learning the intricacies of the landscape over time, by accepting the limitations and the possibilities, the Hopi have been able to grow the plant that sustains their way of life. Through this dance, I am learning to cultivate myself.