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Tribal Transformations:



Dancers in Bloom

BY HILARY GIOVALE

AFTER A LONG WINTER OF SNOW, ICE, AND WIND, SPRING HAS FINALLY ARRIVED IN THE MOUNTAINS OF FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA. WATCHING THE SNOW SLOWLY MELT AND TRICKLE DOWN TO FEED THE DAFFODILS, TULIPS AND GRAPE HYACINTH, IT'S MADE ME THINK ABOUT TRANSFORMATION, HOW OUR WORLD IS CONSTANTLY IN A PROCESS OF CHANGE. OFTEN THIS CHANGE BEGINS ON A SUBTLE LEVEL AND EVENTUALLY IT BECOMES AS OBVIOUS AS SPRINGTIME.

For years I've been interested in how Tribal bellydance affects women's feelings and ideas about their bodies. But there are many more ways this type of dance can transform us. For this column, I asked my classes the open-ended question "How has Tribal bellydance transformed you?"

The responses I received were illuminating. I watch the ladies in my classes each week with amazement as their movements become more and more confident, more precise and strong. However, I had no idea of the inner transformations they were experiencing through their dance. When I think about the variety of their responses multiplied by all the dance students around the world, I realize what a profound effect we dancers have on each other as we transform ourselves and others on levels seen and unseen.

In the women's statements you'll hear how this dance helps them know the beauty in themselves and others, be present in each moment, feel more confident, have a better connection between mind and body, befriend other women, work through their fears, and enhance a process of recovery from post traumatic stress disorder. Perhaps you'll see your own transformations mirrored here as well:

"When I first watched and tried Tribal belly-

dance I remember thinking, 'I want to be a part of that.' Now I look at other women and I think, 'they could be a part of this too.' Getting together to dance with other women is like taking the time to feed my soul; it helps me be in the now and recharges me." – Stephanie Birdwell

"Tribal bellydance has transformed me in so many ways. I am gaining confidence not only as an individual dancer, but as a group dancer, and as a lead dancer. I am trusting my ability to be in tune with the other dancers and feeling the collective energy of the group. The movement with other dancers is a surrender to the beautiful flow of Tribal Bellydance, and this flows into my daily life as well.

Not only have I noticed positive changes in my body, I am continually amazed by what my body can do. I am seeing the beauty, not only in myself and my body; I am seeing it in others as well. I feel grounded and also connected to my femininity and grace. I am noticing new brain/body connections that come from layering movements with different parts of my body and playing zills all at the same time.

I am more social and I am making new friendships and connecting and communing with wom-

en of all ages. I have a feeling of being accepted. I have a willingness to walk through my fear and open to new and exciting experiences. This dance has ignited a passion and creativity in me, and I am so excited to see what lies ahead. As I continue to pursue this dance it is opening me to see who I am, and all I can be." – Joyce L. Walter

Note: The next student refers to the pride walk, a class exercise we do to practice walking with pride, presence and an open heart.

"Of all the things that I thought I would get out of bellydance I never expected that I would receive healing. For over 10 years I have suffered from PTSD. Bellydance has helped me overcome some of my mind and body's resistance. I never

believed a dance class could make the difference, but it did and is. A few months ago I never ever would have been able to do something like the pride walk. It would have been way too scary, too open, too vulnerable for me to even try. Keeping my shoulders hunched in and slouching forward has been my defense mechanism for over 10 years. Yet after going through just the few class hours that I have with you and the other women in class, I closed my eyes and went for it. It was scary, but very powerful at the same time. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to grow and overcome my body's fears.

It is wonderful to show up every week and have the same people there, doing the same thing that I am (although much more experienced at it!). I love the fact

that so many people in our class have been dancing for a long time; it really gives me people to look up to and admire. It is also nice now that I have been through two sessions to see people who are just starting out. It gives me a chance to see how far I've come in just this short time." – Aileah

Pretty powerful stuff, yes? So, how has bellydance transformed YOU? Whether you are a student, a teacher, or both this is a good question to reflect on. Ask your dance mates or students to share too. It's empowering to see how we are collectively creating a wave of transformation throughout world, energizing our beauty, health, strength and communities through bellydance.

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