

## Intention in Dance

By Hilary Giovale, © 2009

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One of the things I love about bellydance is its shape-shifting nature. Over the years I’ve learned that the dance has different meaning in various times, places, and phases. In each context, bellydance has something new to teach me, some way to transform and enrich my life. Being purposeful and conscious about my intentions in dance enriches its benefits. Here are some of the ways I use intention in my dance life.

**Dancing alone**, my intention is to find that sparkling, shimmering place within as I quiet my mind and obey my body. I put on the music: the dance overtakes me and tells me what to do. Sometimes I’ll start a shimmy drill that lights a fire in my body and realize afterward that it has burned away some stress or tension. Other times, the slow and deliberate movements of maya, taxseem, circles, and waves emerge from my body and they reflect a calm and quiet state of mind. When the zils and faster movements appear, I dance till I’m out of breath and know that I’m full of energy or inspiration. Whatever the case may be, my body knows how to express it, deal with it, heal it, and use it. When I dance alone, I’m flooded with gratitude for my body, connected, and ready to move forward in peace.

**When I teach a class**, it’s like juggling three balls: fun, good technique, and clear communication. The students come in chatting and laughing together, and then I have the privilege of watching them come into themselves as we center our bodies and minds. As they grapple with learning how to move their bodies in these foreign but familiar ways, I love to see them focus, hear their questions, find a new way of explaining something. But perhaps my favorite part is when we put on music and I hear the women’s laughter and feel the energy rise as we dance together in happiness. What an awesome opportunity to be a conduit for this powerful, complex, beautiful dance to reach the women around me.

**Taking a class**, I am like a piece of crusty bread dipping into a bowl of broth: I just want to soak it all up. Listening to each teacher as she brings her personality and past to the dance nourishes me. It gives me new ways of understanding the dance, new ways of explaining it to myself and to my students. I savor the class energy each teacher creates and ponder how it is similar to or different from my own. I covet the opportunity to be taught, to experience the dance through another’s interpretation.

**Dancing with my girlfriends** is all about surrender. I love the challenge of following them no matter what, even when their musical interpretation or transition is different than what I would do. As much as we love to chat, it’s a time to let words fall away and create the alchemy of group movement. I relish the moments of synchronicity, when their bodies show my body what to do; there is no planning or thought involved, just the immediacy of movement. It’s about moving beyond ourselves, about creating something beautiful that contains parts of us but also transcends us.

**Before performing**, I carefully select, prepare, and wrap a gift to share. Adornment is a ritual that communicates the worth of the gift. It starts with the clothing, whether it’s pants, skirts, belts, cholis, or a coin bra. It proceeds with the makeup, chosen

to be appropriate for the venue and time of day. Next comes the head adornment such as flowers or a wrap. It continues with jewelry and an outer wrap.

But perhaps the most important adornment is the feeling that permeates me as I don the costume: the confidence and surety at the center of the whole package. This feeling of self-acceptance is one of the greatest gifts I have received during my relationship with the dance. I know that beside me, my sister dancers will speak their transformations and unique beauty as we perform. Together, we'll share our gifts with the audience.