

The Spiritual Tradition of
Isadora Duncan

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Constantinople, 1914: “Daughter of the Sun, you have been sent to give great joy to all people. From this joy will be founded a religion. After many wanderings, at the end of your life, you will build temples all over the world. In the course of time, you will return to this city where, too, you will build a temple. All these temples will be dedicated to Beauty and Joy because you are the daughter of the Sun.” (Armenian psychic speaking to Isadora Duncan; Duncan, 1914)

East Hampton, 1960: The “temple” room itself felt like the “fount of light” (1) with three glass walls and a fourth shrouded by a simple blue drapery. The sounds of the wind, the sea and the birds seemed amplified in the silence of transport we experienced sitting in wait of the music, in a circle, in tunics. Moments before, whispering and giggling in our shorts and sneakers, we girls shared the secrets of our morning as we opened the ritualistic drawer of Pandora’s Box, anticipating the simple garments which somehow transformed us into Goddesses. I loved the metamorphosis, which seemed to begin when I held the silk tunic in my hands. The world became still and warm, my friends felt like sisters who, with me, shared a divine secret. Together we were about to enter a place of reverence, where our silence would permit inspired music and eternal visions of beauty to fill us. Here in this place we were both heroic Amazons and diaphanous winged creatures, changing with the music, like many faces of love. Here we held the hands of Athena and Aphrodite in our graceful walk through the midsummer’s forest. Here in the magic place, no competition, anger or hate darkened our hearts. Walking towards a visionary oasis I felt myself deep in prayer: Running was the chase of the wind or the ebb and flow of a dynamic sea: circling and entwining, we girls were the flower maidens, nymphs, fauns, satyrs, and graces of Dionysus, the Bacchae, and of Botticelli. Ennobled yet humbled, peaceful yet joyous, we were in true communion with each other, the music and the world around us. We were engaged in the true dance of love..... “Practicing movements which ennobled rather than

defiled the divine image of the human body, finding that element which takes on all parts of nature and becomes, in turn, a cloud, a mist, a fire, a bull, or a white swan.” (Duncan, 1928)

We understood what I now know to be profound secrets of the outer and inner meanings of nature and natural forces through religious sense of movement. These pure truths could never be taught to us verbally. Surely we never talked about what we knew. Were there any words to describe the musical inspiration and the streaming of soul light through our bodies which ennobled us with movements possessing spiritual grace and power? Here was a place to worship all the beautiful forms in nature. Here was one of the temples of Isadora Duncan, where as a child I received the gifts of her legacy.

HISTORY

Isadora Duncan, the legendary free spirit, born in Oakland, California in 1877, was the founding matriarch of modern dance. From the shackles of corsets and toe shoes, she attempted to free the bodies of dancers so that they might reflect the beautiful movements inherent in nature. The Dance of the Future, as she referred to her Art, was a dance for all humanity, originally inspired by the heroic spirit of the American pioneer and spiritually akin to the ancient Greek choral dance. The referral to Duncan’s work as “Greek dancing” is misleading; although inspired by their art, which reflected the ideal beauty inherent in the rhythms and movements of nature, it was to that source, nature, which she ultimately turned for her designs. She described here Dance of the Future as:

“... A new movement, a consequence of the entire evolution which mankind has passed through. We are not Greek, and will not return to the dances of the Greeks. But the dance of the future will have to become again a high religious art as it was with the Greeks. For art which is not religious is not art, is mere merchandise.” (Duncan 1928).

Duncan was greatly dedicated to her original vision of creating an American dance from which in its absolute beauty and freedom, would reflect the spirit of young America. This spirit was exemplified by the poet Walt Whitman, whose spiritual daughter Duncan called herself:

“O we can wait no longer,
We too take ship, O soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores.” (Whitman)

Inspired by the Greeks, whom she considered to be the greatest students of the laws of nature, her work expressed spiritual beauty with its promise of eternal return. For in nature there are no ends:

“People have long thought that so long as one danced in rhythm, the form and design did not matter; but one must perfectly correspond to the other, The Greeks understood this well... Movements in their art revolved from the movements in nature, The concentration and evolution of these natural forces was always expressed in the representation of Greek art will be the Art of humanity for all time.”

Duncan believed the real American to be an idealist and a mystic, not a gold chaser. For its great rough land with its broad open windswept spaces, America produced what she thought were artists of a consistent mold; a combination of Puritan, mystic, and striver after the heroic expressing. (Duncan 1927). It was for America that she envisioned creating her Dance of the Future-the dance of Freedom, Joy, and Brotherhood:

“.....let them come forth with great strides, leaps, and bounds, to dance the language of the pioneers, the fortitude of our heroes, the justice of our statesman , and the inspired love and tenderness of our mothers. When the American children dance in this way, it will make them more beautiful beings worthy of the greatest Democracy. That will be America dancing.” (Duncan 1927).

Unfortunate to her dream for America was her country’s ultimate misunderstanding of her art. It was the soviet government (1921) which finally provided her with a school. Disillusioned with the hypocrisy and inequality of Europe and America she turned to the ideal domain of communism where she believed the ideal state dreamed of by Plato, Marx, and Lenin, by some miracle, had been created on earth:

“Now for the World of Comrades. The dream that had been conceived in the head of Buddha; the dream that had resounded through the words of Christ; the dream that had been the ultimate hope of all great artists, Lenin has turned into a reality. I am entering now into this dream, that my work and life might become part of its glorious promise.” (Duncan, 1927)

It was for America that she set out, at the age of 21, on a spiritual pilgrimage to Athens, which she considered to be the very holiest shrine of Art; to the Parthenon, the pinnacle of perfection; and to the spirit of the invisible goddess Athena. With no desire for fame or fortune, she swept across Europe, en-route to Athens, and by her dancing, shattered schools and traditions, accomplished a revolution, revived an Art, and mesmerized the greatest artists and philosophers of her time (Duncan 1928):

“It is far back, deep down the centuries, that one’s spirit had to pass when Isadora Duncan dances; back to the very morning of the world, when the greatness of the soul found free

expression in the beauty of the nobody, when rhythm of motion corresponded with the rhythm of sound, when the movements of the human body were one with the wind and the sea, when the gesture of a woman's arm was as the unfolding of a rose petal, the pressure of her foot upon the sod as the drifting of a leaf to the earth. When all the fervor of religion, of love, of patriotism, sacrifice or passion expressed itself to the measure of the cithara, the harp or the timbrel, when man and woman danced before their hearthstones and their gods in religious ecstasy, or out in the forests and by the sea because of the joy of the life that was in them, it had to be that every strong, great, or good impulse of the human soul poured from the spirit top the body in perfect accord with the rhythm of the Universe.” (Duncan 1927)

Her absolute devotion to her Art and to her destiny to create a school of Dance that would educate the youth of the world in Truth, Beauty, Philosophy, and Harmony can be paralleled to the devotion of saints to their gods. Regardless of spiritual or physical obstacles, she lived her life and her Art indivisibly. This Art was rooted in the spirit of the American pioneer and in the Greek ideal of beauty. It was further inspired by the three great masters, who she referred to as the precursors of the Dance of our century- Beethoven, Nietzsche, and Wagner: “Beethoven created the Dance on mighty rhythm, Wagner in sculptural form, Nietzsche in spirit.” (Duncan 1927.

Examples will follow showing similarities between the lives and doctrines of various spiritualists and those of Isadora Duncan. I humbly attempt to establish her Dance and the participation in it (as either audience or student) as a spiritual tradition of the Goddess or matrilineal form. As a fourth generation Duncan dancer and practitioner, I hope to make lucid the philosophies and practices which are transmitted, through the generations, by students of the Art.

I hope to clarify the connection between the resurgence of the Goddess traditions and the intense renewal of interest in not only Duncan's philosophy, but the actual Dances themselves.

SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY

Isadora's early childhood in Victorian San Francisco was one of poverty, although her heredity had meant contact with the arts and culture from her earliest years: through her father who was a scholar, collector and devotee to the Greek civilization, and through her mother who was a musician and lover of literature. She considered her time with her mother, who played Beethoven, Schumann, and Chopin on the piano and read to her the writings of Whitman, Shakespeare, Goethe, Haeckel, Rousseau, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche to be her true education (Duncan 1928).

She rejected at an early age, organized public education:

"I can never remember suffering from poverty at home, where we took it as a matter of course; it was only at school that I suffered. To be proud and sensitive child, the public school system was a humiliating as a penitentiary. I was always in revolt against it." (Duncan 1928)

I am stunned by her resourcefulness and her ability to persevere under the most adverse conditions. From the age of six, when she began to teach the young girls in the neighborhood to dance, she raised money to support her family, with joy. She is continually outspoken about the handicap which she felt money, not earned placed upon spirits of children:

"When I hear fathers of families saying they are working to leave a lot of money for their children, I wonder if they realize that by doing so they are taking all the spirit of adventure from the lives of those children. For every dollar they leave, they make them so

much weaker. The finest inheritance you can give to a child is to allow it to make its own way, completely on its own feet.” (Duncan 1928).

She understood her rather unconventional childhood which allowed her to shut out the influences of society to be a great fortune; this materialistic civilization was responsible for destroying the inspiration of its youth, robbing them of their inherent ability to understand music listened to by the soul:

“Now while listening, do you not feel an inner self awakening deep within you- that it is by its strength that your head is lifted, that your arms are raised, that you are walking slowly toward the light? This awakening is the first step in the dance, and even the youngest child understands; from then on, even in walking, they possess spiritual grace and power which do not exist in any movement born from the physical frame or created from the brain. This is why quite small children appearing at the Metropolitan Opera have been enabled to hold those audiences with a magnetism generally possessed by a few great artists.” (Duncan, 1927).

She, like the first Christian hermits of the deserts of fourth century A.D. Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, and Persia.....

“did not believe in letting themselves be passively guided and ruled by a decadent state, and who believed that there was a way of getting along without slavish dependence on accepted, conventional values.... The society they sought was one where all men were truly equal, where the only authority under God was the charismatic authority of Wisdom, Experience and Love” (Merton 1960).

In her vision for a school that would educate the Youth of the world, she sought a similar society. Through the stuff of nature and the great art which through time has expressed the

beauty of unending, ever increasing and unfolding and unfolding evolution, children would continue to be inspired, growing physically and emotionally more powerful and wise. Isadora rejected the Patriarchal doctrines and dogma of Catholicism, rebelling against marriage and institutions which rendered woman submissive or powerless in a world where equality and harmony were birthrights. Attempting to reclaim these birthrights, she designed a Platonic regime for her family to live by while in modern Greece:

“It was decreed to arise at sunrise. We were to greet the rising sun with joyous songs and dances. Afterward we were to refresh ourselves with a modest bowl of goat’s milk. The mornings were to be devoted to teaching the inhabitants to dance and sing, celebrating ancient Greek gods and giving up modern costumes. After a lunch of green vegetables, the afternoons were spent in quiet meditation, and the evenings given over to pagan ceremonies with appropriate music.” (Duncan 1927).

This devotion to her destiny (to create the school) and to nature as it inspired the soul toward great creations of art or movement, reminded me of the visions of Saint Therese of Lisieux:

“Noticing a palm tree growing in a temperate climate, I used to notice its leaves trembling in the early morning breeze and from them I created in my dance the light fluttering of the arms, hands and fingers, which has been so much abused by my imitators; they forgot to go to the original source and contemplate the movements of the palm tree, to receive them inwardly before given them outwardly.” (Duncan 1927)

Therese revealed through nature, which was full of harmony and simplicity, a life and a path of God which even the most ordinary person could follow:

“If a wildflower could talk, I imagine it would tell quite candidly about all God had done for it; there would be no point in hushing up his gifts to it, out of mock humility, in pretending that it was ugly, that it had no smell, that the sun had robbed it of all its bloom,, or the wind had broken its stem, knowing that all that wasn’t true.” (Ziegler, 1988).

Witchcraft, one of the Goddess traditions, honors the Triple Goddess of birth, love and death, taking its teaching from nature, reading inspiration in the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, the flight of birds, the slow growth of trees and the cycles of the seasons. The waxing and waning of life force which produces more life is seen as the spiral dance.” (Starhawk 1979) Spiritual traditions which honor the Goddess stress:

“The intrinsic unity of all forms of being, the life force or energy. Inner development is encouraged as a profound adventure but only within the spheres of oneness and the realization that all of our fates are inextricably linked. The holistic approaches may be reverential toward the naked truth, but they are also playful and joyful. The respect for all of nature, with ethics of mutual respect, makes violation or dominion impossible.... All forms of being are one, continually renewed in the cyclic rhythms of birth, maturation, death. The goddess honors union and process, the eternal vibrating flux of matter/energy: She expresses the dynamic rather than the static model of the universe.... There is no party line of Goddess worship; rather each person’s process of perceiving and living her truth is a movement in the larger dance.” (Spretnak 1982).

At the core of Isadora’s philosophy is the same celebration of the individual as part of the ever evolving dynamic whole:

“The movement of the waves, of wind, of the earth is ever in the same lasting harmony. We do not stand on the beach and inquire of the ocean what was its movement in the past and what it will be in the future. The movement peculiar to its nature is eternal to its nature.... The movement of the universe concentrating in an individual becomes what is termed the will; for example, the movement of the universe concentrating in an individual becomes what is termed the will; for example, the movement of the earth, being the concentration of surrounding forces, gives to the earth its individuality, it will of movement, So creatures of the earth, receiving in turn these concentrating forces in their different relations, as transmitted to them through their ancestors and to those by the earth, in themselves evolve the movement of individuals which is termed the will..... The primary movements of the dance must have within them the seeds from which evolve all other movements, each in turn to give births to others in unending sequence of still higher and greater expression, thoughts and ideas.” (Duncan 1928).

Like other Goddess traditions, one finds the constant referral in Duncan’s philosophy to the trinity of life, birth, and rebirth, to the continual evolution and unfolding of being, to the harmony of existence as celebrated through the study of nature and the participation in its rhythms. The Duncan tradition determines that all the movements of the earth follow lines of wave motion: Sound, light, water, wind,. Trees, flight. Therefore the physical beginning of movement also follows this undulating pattern; the element is basic to dance. Duncan, in attempting to recreate pure dance was inspired by the pagan cultures, where....”every emotion had its corresponding movement. Soul, body, and mind worked together in perfect harmony” (Duncan 1928). This harmony, which was elemental to her Art, is a basis for the spiritual nature of her work.

“In truth there is nothing mystical about spirituality. The life of the spirit, or soul, refers merely to functions of the mind. Hence spirituality is an intrinsic dimension of human consciousness and is not separate from the body; e.g. the Greek concept ‘pneumatic’ meant breath or spirit or soul and ‘spirit’ comes from the Latin root ‘to breathe.’” (Spretnak 1982).

Isadora discovered that the solar plexus was the place from which movements form the soul began; breathing, we feel the opening and closing of the solar plexus, filling and emptying us with light form the soul, initiating our inspired movements. She described this discovery:

“I spend long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus. Standing quite motionless as if in a trance, I finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversities of movement are born, the mirror of vision form the creation of the dance. Ballet taught that the spring was found in the center of the back at the base of the spine. From this axis, arms, legs, and trunk move like an articulated puppet, producing an artificial mechanical movement not worthy of the soul. I on the contrary, sought the source of the spiritual expression to flow into the channels of the body filling it with a vibrating light- the centrifugal force reflecting the spirit’s vision.” (Duncan 1928).

TRANSMISSION

The wiring of Isadora Duncan are much more explicit in regard to the access of artistic inspiration and the importance of the access, to the individual and universal spiritual harmony, that she is in describing the actual physical movements manifested by such inspiration. This had

led many who are unfamiliar with the actual work of Duncan to criticize her choreographies as improvisational, lacking in technical design. Students of her heritage know this critique to be incorrect. Although I have not seen it written that Isadora refused to do the following, I have learned, through the heritage these facts in regard to the transmission of her work: 1. Duncan chose never to write about the mechanics/pedagogy of her dances and; 2. She never allowed herself to be filmed on moving picture. Students of the tradition, through four generations, believed that Duncan meant for her dance to evolve naturally, being passed down through time directly from student to student; only in this way would the true essence of the dance be transmitted. It was this essence which was most vital to preserve. (Johnson 1987, Gold 1990). She often criticized imitators of her work for moving mechanically without the inspiration of the soul; the primary step requires, which they omitted, going to the source of that in nature to which the movement referred, then finding the physical source (solar plexus) within where the soul inspiration would transform the external movements of the body.

Isadora envisioned the passage of her work as a generational chain, evolving with each new link and transmutation, preserving always the essence which bound them to each other and the universal rhythms of nature. The second generation Duncan Dancers were European children adopted and trained by Isadora to carry on her teachings: The “Isadorables” (Anna, Irma, Marie-Therese, Lisa, Erica, Margo) and Anita Zahn, the pupil of Elizabeth Duncan, Isadora’s sister kept her work alive. Five third generation Duncan dancers, now in their seventies, still dance and teach the art. (See diagram of the Heritage). My training as a child was with Anita Zahn. Anita taught for fifty years and as I was a student later in this cycle, my chronological peers are fourth generation dancers, while I am third. Presently, I study and teach with Sylvia Gold who: 1) was chosen by Irma Duncan to dance in Carnegie Hall with her in 1933, as a child

of seven, and 2) was instrumental in the centennial revival of Duncan dances along with a few of the other Carnegie Hall children, and 3) wrote the first book which depicted in Sutton notation, the first dances taught in the tradition (Schubert waltzes).

Isadora only meant to teach children, who in the tradition, would grow to be beautiful women and dancers of life; The Art, which is the movement of life, would move through them changing, as the colors of the trees with seasons. It is these children who Isadora meant to carry on the legacy of her Art.

There is a very noticeable difference in the teaching style of a dancer who was trained as a child in a Duncan school and one who learned the technique as an adult dancer, the former using childlike and natural referents, and the latter being more analytical in their descriptions. We, who were the children, recognize each other; we share phrases and questions from our youths such as:

Who can tell how fast the wind is blowing?

Up to your nose and out with your toes.

Let your body be like the bow and never the

Arrow

Your costume should never be vivid- your

Colors come from inside

You are always in perfect posture if your

Heart is the first thing to enter the room.

To be part of the whole is ingrained; we should

Not have to be told

Being a 'big girl' has a reverence which we

Aspire toward

Watch quietly

How do you think a bird/animal knows what to

Do next?

Emotional desire will lift you up

The wind is pushing you across the sky, you

Reach for the sun, then the wind pulls you

Back again

Give in to the earth, letting it receive your

weight

Hear- see- follow, in that order.

The eye of your soul (solar plexus/dancer's

Light) sees first and the eyes on your head

Follow.

A hand to another extends the light from your heart. Hands form the hearts which meet in

Embrace bring back women light to each.

Open your heart to the sun and drag that light

In. Send it out through your heart to

Another.

Find your dancer's light first. It will make you

Smile inside and out. Then you are ready to

Enter.

The branches of the trees can't move unless the

Tree moves

Listen to the music; it will tell you what to do.”

(Johnson, Johnson, & Gold)

To the rhythm of the music we sang these words feeling their inspiration in our young hearts. The songs, the music, and the dances we remembered and carried with our passage, to teach to our young. The evolving nature of the work, with its gentle sub mutations is as all that moves in nature. It was this continual change which Duncan revered. She felt that no two dancers should look exactly the same dancing a dance, and that as a woman ripened with age and experience, so too would her movements. IN this work there is nothing which is static, there is a respect for and dignity in the beauty of each life change; Duncan’s work is as beautifully danced by a five year old and it is by a sixty year old, each expressing the beauty of that age. Participating in movement which glorifies the beauty which is individual to each as well as harmonious with the rhythms of nature is both therapeutic and spiritual.

METHODOLOGY

Isadora defined a general methodology for the educating of children in the Art of life... and it was to these children that she compelled us to give beauty, strength, and freedom. Her teachings persevere through the generations ever waxing and waning like the moon of time. As previously mentioned, the Art is passed from mother to child, like a folktale whose heart ever beats within every changing form. I will humbly attempt to reveal the heart of Duncan’s original pedagogy and to follow its evolution to present day, through my own work.

It was for the simple forms in nature, which by their communion with each other, created ideal beauty and love, that Isadora had her deepest reverence. Beauty was to be looked for and found in children: “Hand in hand they are more beautiful than any string of pearls...” (Duncan

1927). In the observation of or participation in this communion, between any living creatures or rhythms of nature, spiritual inspiration and/or ecstasy can be achieved. Because nothing is static, nature offers ever changing and aspiring beauty. God is the absolute Oneness of nature in all and in each part. We experience God when inspired by absolute beauty of form, sound, or movement within ourselves or without. It is at the moment of opening that God is revived- in the opening of a flower, in the rising of the sun, in the birth of a child; in the closing, that being carries God within to pass on through the changing dance of day to night, from mother to child. We open our eyes, receive the light, the light flows through us, and we now, inspired, move with such beauty and grace, that we inspire the next soul whose eyes have opened to gaze upon the God with us. The light illuminates eternity in its changing form. Duncan stressed that the child must be educated in a way that their bodies and souls were strong and pure, ever aware and inspired. In their living/learning environment should be placed different ideal representations of the child movement, dreamed by the painters and sculptors of all ages:

“All these figures have a certain fraternity in the naïve grace of their form and movements, as if the children of all ages met each other and joined their hands across the centuries, and the real children of my school, dancing in the midst of these forms, would grow to resemble them, to reflect unconsciously the joy and the same childlike grace. It would be the first step toward becoming beautiful. I also placed in my school the figures of young girls of Sparta dancing, running, and jumping. They represented the future ideal to attain, and learning to feel an intimate love for these forms, would become each day a little more imbued with the secret of this harmony. I believe that it is only upon awakening the will for beauty that one can obtain beauty.” (Duncan 1927)

To attain the harmony desired, of mind and body, students must for through daily exercise conceived in a way to coincide with their own intimate wills, so they would be accomplished with good humor and eagerness. Each was seen as an end in itself, and that end was to render each day of life complete. Air, light and “gymnastics” were necessary to draw out all the vital forces of the body toward its fullest development. Into the body harmoniously developed and carried to its highest degree of energy, enters the spirit of the dance (Duncan 1927).

The nature of the exercises is to make the body an instrument for the expression of harmony, evolving and changing through all things. Following “gymnastic” preparation of the muscles, the first steps of the dance come. The progressions of the steps are as follows:

1. Simple rhythmic walk/march moving slowly to simple rhythm
2. Walk/ march quickly to more complex rhythms
3. Run slowly then jump slowly at a certain moment in rhythm,

These exercise composed the notes of the scale of movement, which combined create the most varied and subtle harmonies of structure. The children moved freely in graceful drapes outdoors, observing the qualities peculiar to each movement in nature. They were to feel in their soul a secret attachment, unknown to others, to initiate them into nature’s secrets. (Duncan 1927)

Irma Duncan, who was, of Isadora’s students, considered to be the best teacher, published a book describing the exercise in a straight forward, almost humorous manner:

“Run diagonally across the room, take the corners easily, slowing down the motion, then throw yourself with new impulse forward again. Keep your eyes fixed in the direction you are running. Don’t run around aimlessly. After steady practice, your run will take on the semblance of a bird in flight.” (Duncan 1937)

Such verbal descriptions as Irma's book offers, are useful for teachers of the Art who have studied under the heritage from childhood. They are dangerous, however, for novices who are attempting to learn the technique through static pictures and verbally translated images. Movement attempted after such learning would be superficial, external, mechanical, and not the Dance which must be inspired from the source.

I recall the quiet circle of transport of my youth. I was one pearl in the necklace preparing to glow. That circle had been carried in velvet, close to my heart, for my young students. begins with that ritual of transport, where each child sitting quietly in the circle outside of the dance room, is encouraged to place her hands gently over her dancer's light (solar plexus) as to let that light of love shine so brightly that it tickles and warms her inside and out. Her silly sounds or angry hands must remain outside. Each at her own pace determines her entrance into the room full of light, like a heart, where she transforms herself by virtue of her inspiration and the music. Classes contain the exercise and preparations described by Duncan, always accompanied by classical music. The young child is taught dances from the repertoire whose music and music are emotionally young and light, early Mozart, the waltz cycles of Schubert, the song cycles of Mendelssohn, and preludes of Chopin. As the child becomes physically and emotionally more able, music with greater weight and passion is danced: Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms, Gluck, Liszt, Bach, and Scriabin.

Although I do not remember being taught, I have assimilated the lesson of breath and its obvious connection to movement. The solar plexus, the home of the soul, is also the home of the breath. My students are taught to breathe fully and to move naturally from that breathe; it is only through stress acquired as a result of cultural pressures that adults hold their breath, unnaturally. Children, as a rule, do not. As in nature, everything opens, lifts, expands, rises, to its capacity,

then closes, sinks, contracts, falls, to open again and again; So with breath and movement. The exercise that I teach make harmonious the breath and its correspondent movement (Ex.: Inhale- rise pressing down into the earth reaching with your heart and eyes which are lifting you up, then exhale- let your eyes, heart and eyes which are lifting you up, then exhale- let your eyes, heart and arms fall softly until your knees bend and your fingers touch the earth). This coordination is as vital as is the coordination between the music and the dance.

A Vertical support is established within as each child imagines a flow of light moving through them from the earth, through their feet, and out the top of their heads. From this center flows the light/energy which moves the trunk, head, and limbs. An all encompassing and surrounding network of circles, spirals, and waves is established without, as the child feels the atmospheric (energetic) support of the wind or ocean waves around, under and above them. This support facilitates light and fluid movements: “The wind comes from behind you, lifts you up, opens your wings, and carries you across the sky”.

The body standing in stillness is described as a landscape, with the arms rising to the level of the horizon. Below the horizon, the physical body represents the earth; above, the spiritual body, or head, represents the heavens. Feet are encouraged to caress the earth, sinking in and lingering with each step walked (rather than being help in a forced arch on top of it); Moving through simple, universal motions: walking, running, skipping, jumping, kneeling, reclining, rising, the children move ennobled in various configurations representative of the varied relationships in life: whole group, individual, dyadic, triadic. Eye contact with and quiet awareness of all the dancers is developed. (Do birds ever run into each other while flying through the sky?)

Because posture, balance, motivation, and inspiration are achieved internally, with breath initiating and changing each movement, because the Dance follows the intricate yet simple designs of nature, it is accessible to all. The evolution of my work had brought me to students to whom dance was previously denied: the mentally retarded, the blind, the deaf, and the physically or emotionally impaired. Each in his own way is seeking the joy which harmonious interaction within oneself, with others, and with the music brings. And for some, who by virtue of their disability, have developed emotionally or cognitively only to the level of a child, inspiration and the ability to hear music with the soul, are preserved regardless of their chronology. There are some lessons for us all here.

As each dancer inspired by the same song will have a movement unique to the alone, so too must the words, which in teaching the dance, suit each dancer. My students, young and old, able and disabled, form the variegated tapestry which is nature in all its beauty. Perhaps this perception of beauty has changed since Isadora's conception of it; some of my students are society's embarrassments. In this temple, where four generations of woman share together in the dance of Chopin's prelude, where blind Mentally Retarded students wait, listening to the music, to don their tunics, where a man born without a face has found the unbridled joy of leaping, here is found the symphony of life with all its flowers and weeds. Here is life in its fullness, ever, expanding, eternal. Here in this temple, dedicated to Beauty and Joy, the God of the Sun takes shelter. This is the spiritual tradition of Isadora Duncan, ever pulsing, ever changing.