



Dance as Ritual

The Magic in Movement

BY ZEHARA NACHSAH

Zehara Nachsah is a Voodoo practitioner, ceremonial magician, and modern-day necromancer based in Tucson, Arizona. She is currently studying forensic anthropology and makes one-of-a-kind ritual jewelry for all magical paths. Visit her website at www.snakeandbone.com.

I am a dancer by nature. I have been dancing since childhood. I have studied various forms of dance, including ballet, tap, jazz, Russian Romani, African, and belly dance. Dancing is what I do when I am happy, sad, stressed, anxious, chipper—it's also what I do when I am feeling a need for deep spiritual connection.

I have been a practicing Pagan since the age of 13, so it's no surprise that dance started to creep into my spiritual practice. I started integrating dance into my magical work during a Beltane ritual in which I felt this sudden "urge" to move. It was almost as if my brain had completely shut off and the only noise I heard was the pulsing rhythms of the drums. I was completely taken over by my spirit. That was the moment I realized that dance and magic could be used together to create something so primal and pure—the true essence of the human spirit.

Dancing has been used for thousands of years as a means of communication to deity or in reverence for a higher power. There are many styles of "ritualistic" dance: the Middle Eastern zar dance, Morris dance, Long Sword dance, circle dance, and most notably,

the Sema or "Whirling Dervish," in which dancers whose continuous spin forms a deep spiritual mindset, much like the peaceful state induced during meditation. One can look at ancient cave paintings or Egyptian art to see paintings of temple dancers honoring their gods via movement and physical expression. Dance is also used in various indigenous practices, like those of Native American, Pigmy, and African cultures, as a form of prayer.

As a dancer, my dance has always had spiritual roots. I fell in love with gypsy dance because of the passionate, magical sound of the violin—the music invoked a sense of mysticism, and my body moved with the violin as if I were a part of it. I fell in love with belly dance because of its complex earthy rhythms and the ability to connect to the Mother Goddess. My new love for African and Aboriginal dance has come from the primal earthbound roots I feel when performing it. When I am performing, some aspect of my spirituality is invoked.

To me, dancing is magic—a spell. If I want to banish something, I will do a sword or fire dance. When