

2008: Inner Grace Through Self-Love

When I was a young man in the 1970s, my heart called me to the pursuit of a career in ballet. The joy I got from dancing was indescribable. But I only yearned for grace and poise through physical movement. My ballet masters included very little instruction on social poise or emotional grace. And there was even a mysterious song of the spirit that I was too young to fathom and no ability to reach. And so, although I learned to dance with my head and heart, I failed to dance from my soul.

I could work with the invisible force of gravity to achieve the illusion of physical flight through technical perfection. But without loving myself through the process, my arrogance consistently knocked me off balance in other ways. All the physical strength I gleaned didn't give me the spiritual strength I needed to become truly great from the inside out. I could dance with graceful partners on stage, but I didn't know there was a *pas de deux* I could have with myself, a dance of head and heart to the music in my soul.

My sex life reflected my spiritual weakness because it was a series of leaps at love from which I always seemed to land with a thud. What I needed were experiences of the heart that were deeper and more meaningful, not new and different.

There was no one better than me for me to go to, to teach me how to love myself first, but I was the last person I wanted to get to know. It never occurred to me that I couldn't give others what I hadn't first given myself.

There was a ballet master in my heart and a choreographer in my soul the whole time telling me where to turn and what steps to take, to improve the *depth* of my performance in life. But I wouldn't listen to my intuition. I wasn't ready for that level of intimacy with myself.

Even though I told myself love began as a silent song from within that I could learn to dance to in the studio and on stage, I kept slipping and falling emotionally in my relationships with my peers because I was figuratively stepping on my own toes.

And romantically, each time my heart was broken some of the hope in my heart leaked out, leaving me feeling a little emptier inside. Intuition told me that there was another layer of love deeper than loving others, but I couldn't hear the whisper within to consider loving myself to fill the void. I couldn't believe that love, like dance, was something that had to be learned from the inside out.

I began my ballet studies with the Ballet Ruses, child prodigy dancer, Tania Raibouchinska. She had married her dance partner, the Russian dancer/choreographer David Lachine, and together they later opened the Lachine Ballet Studio in Beverly Hills. She modeled her lifelong love of dance not only through dance technique, but through voice, manner and etiquette. I could feel that she was in touch with the artist within, and I wanted to grow up to be like her. She was *childlike*, not *childish*. I saw her as embodying the qualities of spiritual grace I yearned for.

Through painstaking regard for the pursuit of the mystery in my body, the art of ballet slowly yielded its secrets to me. Motion unlocked emotion. And I learned that I couldn't divorce my soul from the pursuit of the joys of the body, heart and mind. I was a dancer, not because I earned a living through dance with the Bat-Dor Dance Company of Israel, but because I was one of the lucky few who loved to learn about the magical mystery of the self through movement.

But I had to learn to love the man I saw in the studio mirror. I had to figuratively date myself for years, asking myself constantly if I were the kind of person I could spend a lifetime with. And when I suddenly realized I yearned to share myself with me entirely, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, until death we did part – I popped the question and married myself this year in a quiet ceremony alone in Israel. Then and there I promised never to divorce myself from me with substances, cynicism or self-hatred.

Learning to accept *me* as my soul mate for life was the greatest act of love I've ever received. It made peace with my parents and my past, and brought me the feeling of a future filled with hope.

In the brief time I've been wedded to me I've had to assure myself of my fidelity with thousands of figurative hugs and kisses especially since I still take four ballet classes a week at the age of 56, and now have to face an aging body in the mirror. I've had to have faith in me, believe in me and put my trust in me. But as a result, my self-confidence has risen enormously, and I respect myself in a way I never could before.

Others even seek out my company to learn how to keep hope alive by dancing from the inside out. My marriage to me has been a new beginning in getting to know *others* better, and my relationship to my community is stronger because of it. Giving myself a "happily ever after" ending to every day doesn't preclude me from loving others all the more. In fact, it makes it much easier.