

# The Symbolic Wisdom of Traditional Dances

Traditional ritual dances from the Balkans and the Near East embody sacred patterns connected to the archetypal image of the Great Mother Goddess: the circle, crescent, serpent, zigzag, triangle, spiral, and Tree of Life. Through loving attention to style & background, we can learn how to listen to the hidden wisdom of these simple yet powerful dances.

I see each traditional dance as a map or a message, passed down from our ancestors in the human family and containing wisdom still relevant to our lives today. The messages encoded in this symbolic language attest to an ancient worldview of sustainability, community, and reverence for the earth, the body and the feminine. If we approach the dances with respect for style and detail, including political, historical and spiritual contexts, we can rekindle our memory of this worldview. Understanding the hidden meaning within the movements brings greater awareness, gratitude and joy into our dancing and into our world.

The symbolic wisdom of traditional dances offers guidance to rediscover the inner homeland of the dancing body, and to experience dance as a means of healing and transformation. These dances are our living inheritance from the grandmothers of the human family. They invite us all to be more fully at home in our bodies, and more fully ourselves in the world, by journeying Deeper into the Dance.

I thank all of my teachers in life who have helped me to begin to perceive this mystery, and I close with the words of two masters from the East who speak directly to these themes:

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

Rabindranath Tagore

“...Symbology has served to keep the ancient wisdom intact for ages. There are many ideas relating to human nature, to the nature of life, to God and God’s many attributes, and to the path towards the goal, which can be and have been expressed in symbols.... To the one to whom symbols speak of their nature and of their secret, each symbol is in itself a living manuscript. Symbology is the best means of learning the mysteries of life, and also one of the best ways of passing on ideas which will continue to live after the teacher has passed away. It is speaking without speaking; it is writing without writing.”

Hazrat Inayat Khan  
The Unity of Religious Ideals, p. 213-214

(c) Laura Shannon 2006