

The Tao of Tango

A sweaty little tango parlor can become a sacred space where one can dance through memories and karma.

GOSWAMI KRIYANANDA, founder of the Temple of Kriya Yoga on Chicago's west side, says that Westerners go through life with insatiable appetites, spawned by our ego desires, and as a result, true nourishment eludes us. He encourages *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), and urges detachment from desire through practicing pranayama, mantra, and yoga. But I find disengaging from the physical body a frustrating if not futile process. Instead, I have found another technique to liberate the soul: tango.

Standing on the sidelines at the tango club, clutching the folds of my gray skirt, I gaze upon couples shuffling counterclockwise around a dance floor to a staccato melody. Disco balls throw their sparkle against the solemn spectacle. Most couples, eyes pinched tight, seem to be riding waves of private rapture.

One woman, her long braid streaked with gray hanging somberly down her back, does demure *ochos*, a series of tight kicks in a figure-eight pattern, with an almost invisible lick of pleasure on her lips. Beside her, a tango queen brushes one fishnet-stockinged leg across the floor in a deliberate semicircle before abruptly hiking a spiked heel to her thigh.

For me, tango is a kind of mediation between yearning and *santosha* (contentment). With its restrained passion, the dance transcends the limitations of dualistic thinking. Like an asana practice, tango requires simultaneous surrender and discipline. In its purest form, it is improv of the soul, two bodies pressed cheek to cheek, following an invisible line of breath and energy.

As I hover in *cruzada*, one foot crossed behind the other, I lose all sense of time and space, as in meditation. Yet



while dancing I am fully present, aware, as in yoga, of the most subtle movements of my inner anatomy. Pressed to my partner, I can feel the beating of his heart beneath his thin silk shirt, the flush of his cheek, the warm weight of his hand on the small of my back.

In tango, two strangers meet and, within seconds, if the alchemy is right, explore the intimate wrestling of desire, the tension between dominance and submission. And when at last they surrender as one, their pelvises pressed together and their steps so synchronized their ankles appear to be joined, the struggle is over. In that moment, the Zen of tango awakens.

Tango writer Rafael Flores notes that the dance transcends base human emotions: "In it we find love, hate, hope, and resentment, affirmation of life and death, transformed into rhythm and poetry." A sweaty little tango parlor can become a sacred space

where one can dance through memories and karma.

In this way, a dance suffused with sensuality achieves the same goal as *pratyahara*. In meditation, *pratyahara* peaks when *citta vritti* (mind-chatter) is purged so that the senses cease to record data, allowing the mind's eye to focus inward.

Surrendering to the throbbing *lila* ("cosmic dance") of tango, I meditate in movement. The waves of music, an eerie plinking of a piano, or doleful wail of the accordion-like *bandoneon* wash over me and I feel baptized, elated, nourished in body and soul. ■

Chicago-based writer and batha teacher Deirdre Guthrie's diet for metaphysical health consists of ample doses of yoga and tango.