

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Dancing Mindfulness: A Creative Path to Healing and Transformation

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Introduction: The Art of Dancing Mindfully

Prior to reading this book, did you have any experiences with dance? Mindfulness? Meditation? What were they? If you had no experiences, what pictures or ideas did you associate with mindfulness and dancing?

Consider these words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (p. xx): “Don’t become a Buddhist. The world doesn’t need more Buddhists. Do practice compassion. The world needs more compassion.” How does this famous teaching of his relate to your life?

In what ways has “living on autopilot” impacted your health and wellness?

What are your hopes for how this book might relate to you? What are you curious about? Is there anything you’re hesitant about?

Chapter 1—Breath: Life Dancing Through Us

The book poses the question, What if we could learn to cherish our breath as life itself dancing through our being? Consider bringing this forward for discussion, keeping these questions in mind:

- How do you interpret the teaching of Kabir (p. 3), which proclaims that God is the breath inside the breath?
- What does it mean for you to breathe something into existence?
- What does it mean for you to allow your breath to be your guide throughout life?

How does changing your breath impact your thoughts and your behaviors?

How can you dance using only the breath as a spiritual practice?

How can mindful breathing assist in helping you to silence the inner critic?

Chapter 2—Sound: Attunement to the Process of Living

What are some ways (other than music) that you experience or work with the element of sound in your spiritual practice?

Consider your relationship to sound and music, with a few questions to keep in mind:

- Is there a song that, no matter when or in what form you hear it, you have a deep emotional response to? If so, share a little bit about that song and the effect it has on your body-mind-spirit.
- Consider this proverb (and its variations), shared in the chapter: “When the music changes, so does the dance.” How have you experienced this phenomenon in your life?
- What do you tend to experience when you listen to music that is outside of your comfort zone?

- Share a special theme that you've made a playlist about or would like to create a playlist for.

Chapter 3—Body: A Vessel for Authenticity

Consider these beautiful words from Swami Vivekananda (p. 43): “The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him—that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free.” Discuss how the tensions between others and your body have affected you, considering the following questions:

- What factors make accepting this wisdom a challenge for you?
- How has competing with or comparing yourself to others, especially about issues connected to the body, affected you over the years?
- In what ways did societal rules about gender impact your own development?

What does it mean to listen to your body? What can your body teach you about yourself?

What has been your experience with tapping into the sense of dance, play or creativity that is within you? If you haven't been able to do that yet, what do you think is stopping you?

Chapter 4—Mind: Bringing Us Home to the Present Moment

Consider this popular phrase, often attributed to Lao Tzu (p. 65): “When you are depressed, you are living in the past. When you are anxious, you are living in the future.” What has been your experience with the truth in this saying? What connections do you see between mindful practice and healing past wounds?

Pages 68–71 discuss the triune brain and the notion of the mind being more than just thoughts. What does *the mind* mean to you? What do you see as the difference between the mind and the brain?

What does the stillness teach about movement, and what does movement teach about stillness?

Chapter 5—Spirit: The Greatness Guiding Our Dance

What is your personal working definition of *spirit*?

Consider the many elements there are when navigating the intersection between personal spirituality and communal practices. A few questions to keep in mind:

- What is the difference between spirituality and religion?
- What can happen when a community is created around spirituality and spiritual practice? In what ways can it be a positive experience? In what ways can it be a negative one?
- In what ways have experiences of spiritual abuse impacted you?

How can dancing (or other creative practices) be used as a way to pray? A way to express gratitude?

Chapter 6—Story: Embracing Our Journey

Consider how sharing and exchanging stories with others has helped you in your spiritual journey. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What methods do you prefer to use to share your story (or the parts of it that you are ready to share)? Why?
- Which phrase do you prefer, *owning your story* or *embracing your story*? Why?
- What can taking on a different character and enrolling in their story teach you about yourself?
- How do you benefit from witnessing someone else's story?

What kind of props (scarves, fans, etc.) or other media or creative art might you bring into your dance to help deepen your engagement with the story? Why did you choose these props?

Chapter 7—Fusion: Resting in Wholeness

What does the word *fusion* mean to you in the context of the spiritual life?

What has been your experience with the saying “the whole is more than the sum of its parts”?

In what areas do you hope dance will allow you to become whole with yourself? (Consider Melita's story, pp. 135–137.)

What role do you see dance playing in healing the horrible things that we hear about in today's world?

How does your dance allow you to bring together the various pieces of your life experience?

Chapter 8—Leading by Example: Fostering Healing Experiences and Creating Community

Consider your previous experiences with the leadership of one of your communities or groups. How was your experience of the group positively or negatively affected by the actions of the leadership? Some additional questions to consider:

- What do you see as attributes of a healthy leader in creating and fostering community?
- What happened when the leadership was committed (or not committed) to your personal health and safety?
- Have you been affected by figures in leadership forcing intimacy on you or other members of your group in the past?
- What differences do you see between the role of teacher and the role of facilitator?

What does it mean for you for any community (educational, spiritual/religious, etc.) to promote a culture of choice?

Consider discussing any new ideas you might have discovered about leadership, and how you might incorporate them into your own leadership roles. Some questions to keep in mind:

- As a leader, how can you optimally hold space for individuals who are coming forward and taking a risk?
- What role does flexibility play in leadership? What interplay do you see between flexibility and structure?

- How can each of the seven Dancing Mindfulness elements covered in this book help you as you grow as a leader or facilitator?

Conclusion: Redefining Therapy

What does *redefining therapy* mean to you?

What is the link that you see between creativity and healing? What role has creative or expressive arts (dance, music, art, writing, etc.) played in your personal health process?

What role do you hope community can play in enhancing the impact of creativity on the healing process?