

A GUIDE TO HEARTBEAT WORK

How to move through Heartbeat work with integrity?

Years ago I would have thought that a strange question. I believed the accuracy and potency of the Heartbeat map to be enough to ensure a healthy experience for anyone who moved through it. However, there are some things about getting older that are wonderful: becoming more aware of detail and subtlety is one of them, and it's clear to me that many of us ride roughshod through our own integrity on the dance floor.

This astonishingly powerful practice, which builds integrity so simply and effectively, needs care and attention after the first flush of freedom and rejuvenation that comes when we are new to it.

We can easily get carried away by the heat and drama of a group experience, especially working with fear and anger. We get bigger and busier than is really true for us, missing the specific personal nuances of our relationship with those emotions in the moment.

The result of that is at the very least a missed opportunity for healing and self-knowledge. At worst it's the re-traumatizing of the organic system that we are, which is a serious mistaken path for a healing practice.

As a teacher I can set up the space and create awareness of this danger, or I can be oblivious to it and get carried away myself, which I'm sorry to say is what I've sometimes done especially as a younger man.

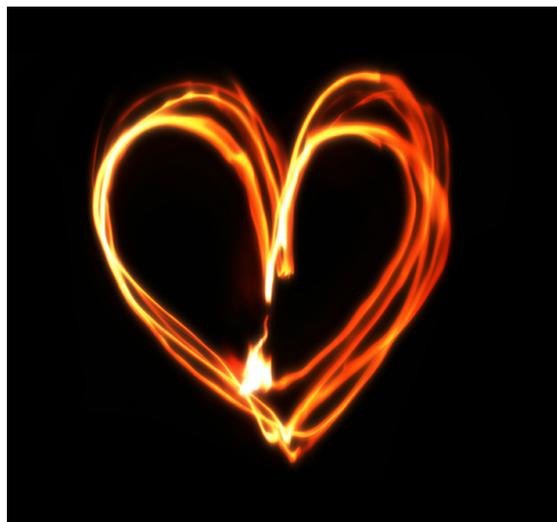
However, the group animal has its own life and will, and at times it's going to be full on wild.

So then it is up to you as a dancer to trust your own experience and stay true to your own flow even if it's nothing like the main current in the room.

That takes practice and determination, and is one of the main reasons why it's so important that you have a grounding in the physical level of the 5rhythms maps ("Waves") before tackling the emotional Heartbeat work.

It may be that your fear-chaos dance is simply a very slight trembling in the hips, not the dramatic flailing dance that you might expect. Maybe it needs to start with you lying on the floor, because the event from years ago that your body is trying to release happened while you were lying down. You don't necessarily need to know where a long-buried feeling came from, but your body has its own intelligence, and will guide you if you are willing and able to listen.

I've been teaching Heartbeat for a while now, since 1999, and it's been a big part of my own practice since 1991. From all I've seen and experienced, I have some suggestions for you to stay true to yourself as you go through the intense experience that is a Heartbeat workshop:



- Trust your own experience, being willing to be different from anyone else in the room.
- Stay very aware of your breath, letting it be part of your movement, and listen keenly to the signals of your body, the position it wants to be in, the way it wants to move, whether it wants to make sound.
- When we've been wounded emotionally, we become misshapen inside — deformed — and to release that we have to experience that deformity embodied. Be willing to take very strange shapes sometimes, or move like someone with a mental illness, or a child who's crazed with distress. Let go of the way you 'normally' dance.
- If you know that you're dealing with severe trauma (most of us are actually, but it's not always at the surface of our conscious experience; just keep tracking and stay curious), then you might do well to get some individual coaching with a teacher you trust. You could at least ask for time to talk to your teacher about it before or after a session. Have a look at the pdf on the Downloads page on this subject.
- Remember that this is not therapy. It's a spiritual practice that evokes your ability to heal yourself at the deepest level. And that involves turning your suffering into art. However intense your suffering is, don't take yourself as seriously as the wounded child inside would like you to. Dance for your life.

Of course it may also be on another day that all such advice is totally unnecessary, and you can just go steaming in and have a rocking great dance. Letting fear and anger rip through you unimpeded can be incredibly good fun and exhilarating, the power and beauty of sadness unleashed completely awesome, the sweetness of joy and vastness of compassion just mind-blowing. But as with any exploration of wilderness, it's good to know how to handle yourself if you get into difficulty.

It's up to you.....

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