

Which bellydance moves rejuvenate and balance the body and mind?

How are they related to ancient Taoist healing exercises?

By Ketī Sharif

Many who participate in dance know that bellydancing makes you feel great. What is its secret? How does this ancient art - based on simple rolling, undulating moves - energise the body and mind? The secret of the dance is its circular, rolling patterns. They activate energy and promote good health. It's that simple. There is no great mastery required - the moves are easy enough to replicate by the advanced dancer and novice alike. Living in Singapore for some time, I became interested in the ancient exercises my Chinese friends did - exercises to rejuvenate the body and mind. I have found that the ancient Chinese exercises used in Tai Chi have a similar flow and pattern to the movements used in bellydance.

The aim of the various Taoist exercises like the dragon, bear, tiger, eagle and crane poses for example, rejuvenate the internal organs. The Tai Chi masters tell me that if external exercises such as vigorous sports, weight training, aerobics classes, running, etc. are not balanced by internal exercises, the organs will be depleted and the result is premature ageing. Even excessive hatha or power yoga is believed to create extra internal 'heat' in the organs, resulting in dryness and ageing that often shows on the face. The exercises in Tai Chi, similar to bellydance, harness vital energies to rejuvenate the internal organs which are the master organs that produce hormones and thus replenish the overall hormonal balance and 'chi' or energetic life force in the body. The moves are also relaxing so the exercises are pleasant to do - they energise the body and heal the internal organs at the same time. The older Tai Chi masters called these exercises 'vital inner massage for health'.



Here, I'll explain the endocrine system in a very basic manner, highlighting the hormonal effect on the body. Then these endocrine energy systems will be related back to the body and specific dance movements.

The endocrine system linked to the chakra system

In Taoism, the glandular or endocrine systems that produce vital hormones are viewed as the base networks for overall health, wellbeing and balance - both physical and emotional. Nobel Prize winning Dr. Alexis Carrel stated that the glandular system was the "wheel of life" that sustained all cellular function in the human body.

The seven glandular systems are in similar alignment with the chakras:

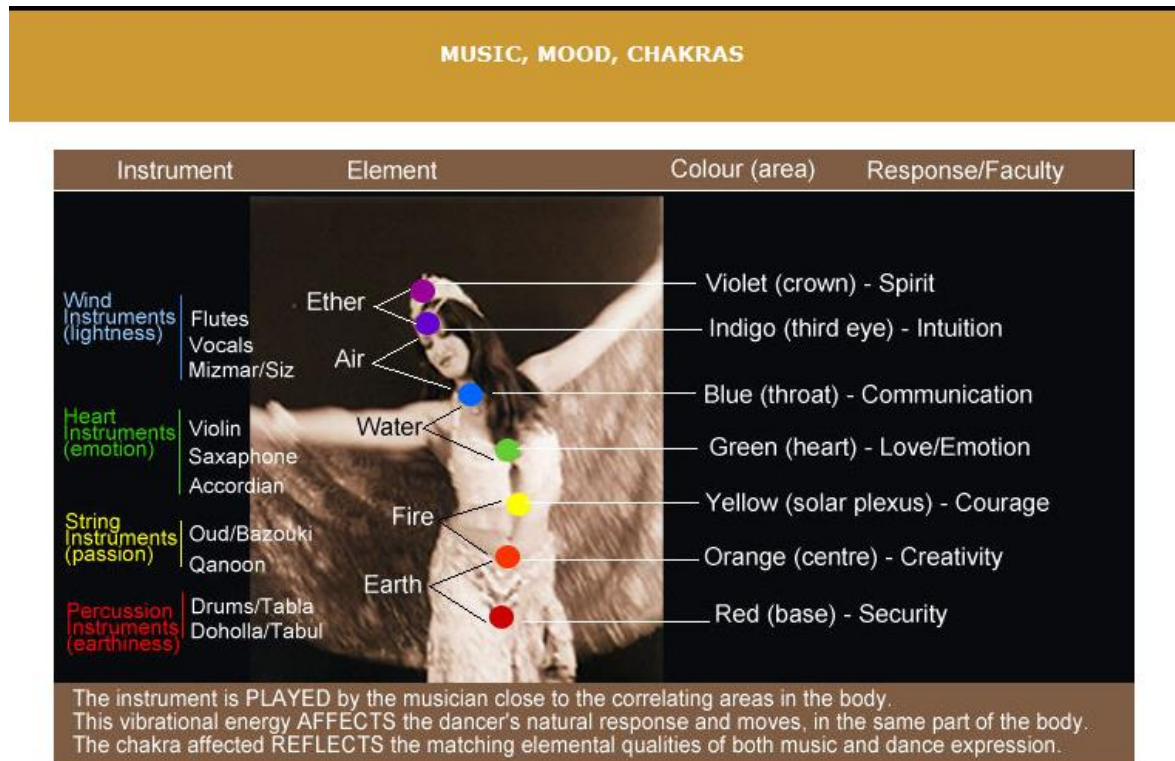
- Pineal - crown chakra (violet)
- Pituitary - third eye chakra (indigo)
- Thyroid - throat chakra (blue)
- Thymus - heart chakra (green)
- Pancreas - solar plexus chakra (yellow)
- Adrenals (kidneys) - solar plexus belly chakras (orange)
- Gonads or sex hormones - belly and base chakras (red)

Really, it's all about energetic vibration. Organs are houses of energy, music is energy, movement is energy. There are patterns and interlinking energy systems that will work together and support the other. To

simply be aware that energy is transferable helps us experience the connectivity between things. I've created a diagram of the chakra systems relating to music:

Hormonal balance vs imbalance

The 5000 year old medicinal theory suggests that one must have all hormonal levels balanced for optimum health. If one energy system is depleted, the others will also suffer weakness because of it, yet if even one system is strengthened, the whole endocrine system will improve. The pancreatic system for example, affects the thymus or heart area. In appropriate levels of insulin



produced by the pancreas will alter the thickness and viscosity of the blood, which will in turn be more difficult to pump through the heart's arteries. This is why many diabetics also have high blood pressure. Another example is the link between kidneys, adrenalin and the ability of the kidneys to filter the blood efficiently. Excess constant stress or the use of cortisones can cause anemia and bone weakening. Stress is extremely depleting on the whole body. So by either energising or depleting one organ, the other organs will be affected.

What master gland affects all others the most?

The master glands, according to the Tao, are the sex hormones. Tai Chi exercises to activate the balance of the gonads consist of circular 'hula-hoop' movements in the hips to recharge the area. The Chinese believe that if the sex hormones are not balanced and strong, the rest of the body will be depleted of vital energy. The simple hip circles used in bellydance will activate the production of sex hormones and hence the exercises have been used to regulate irregular menstrual cycles, PMT and even alleviate the symptoms of menopause. The Chinese Tai Chi masters believe this is an exercise men should do to. The shimmy is a potent hip vibration that accelerates energy through this area, stimulating blood flow and reproductive health. Taoists believe that harnessing the energy within the gonads is the key to longevity. African ritual dance, Hawaiian, Polynesian and other fertility dances with heavy drums tend to activate this area. Earthiness and a feeling of groundedness accompany these moves.

Dance moves: Hip circles, pelvic rolling circles, figure of 8's

Adrenalin and the nervous system

The kidney's adrenals release adrenalin which is over produced in states of high anxiety and stress. This can deplete the other energy systems and unbalance the nerves. Undulations and swaying moves of the lower torso and belly can help the massage the kidneys and rejuvenate the internal organs. The shimmy is also a good activator for the kidneys. The adrenals produce a fiery passion, a dynamism which is seen in Latin and Spanish Flamenco dance - its energy can be activated through guitars and string instruments. The 'tiger' pose in Tai Chi practiced on the balls of the feet with the arms reaching forward whilst the back becomes rounded to massage the kidneys.

Dance moves: Shimmies, accents, figure of 8's

Insulin and the digestive system

A weak pancreas secretes insulin into the bloodstream causing hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and cravings for sweets and carbohydrate which once consumed overstimulate the weak pancreas and hyperglycemia (high blood sugar) may follow, triggering diabetes. A strong pancreas is also a useful aid to proper digestion. The pancreas can be internally massaged through the figure of eight move and also the full torso undulation or body wave. Brass instruments and warm rich melodies activate these moves. In Tai Chi the 'bear' pose is done with the abdomen protruding forward whilst walking rhythmically to massage the pancreas. This can help with regulating insulin production which in turn neutralises sugar cravings. Undulating and rolling the mid and lower torso can help strengthen the pancreas and surrounding organs that aid digestion - namely the liver, gallbladder, stomach and intestines.

Dance moves: Undulations, figure of 8's, belly roll

Happy heart and super immunity

The thymus, if tapped daily as in the Tai Chi practice 'Do-In', boosts health and immunity. The ribcage circles and chest and shoulder shimmy activates the thymus which, in turn regulates the heart and circulatory system. The violin's smooth strokes or the accordion's stretching notes create a swaying effect whilst the req played at the shoulders activates the shoulder shimmy. Music that 'pulls the heartstrings' is ideal to stretch and sway the upper torso to. The thymus rests in the body's 'emotional' centre. The 'eagle' exercise for the thymus in Tai Chi, performed with the arms outstretched to the sides, gliding as the eagle does through the air, is believed to combat melancholy.

Dance moves: Chest circles, shoulder roll, upper body undulations, shoulder shimmy

Energy and communications

The thyroid in the throat chakra governs metabolism and growth. Head slides and neck extensions will help to activate this area. Zills - Artemis' 'Drums of the Air' work with the energy as the head slides and neck moves. The thyroid's health is essential for overall energy, drive and effective communications. Hyperthyroidism overstimulates the secretion of thyroxin which speeds up the metabolism creating anxiety, whilst hypothyroidism creates lethargy. Taoists believe that by massaging the thyroid and throat area the gland can be rejuvenated.

Dance moves: Head slide, neck rotation, zaar or gulf style head sway.



House of Spirit

The pituitary gland is the intelligence gland, controlling memory and thought and the pineal is the spiritual and intuitive centre. Humans are the only animals with a pineal gland - the Taoists believe this gives humans their quest for spirituality. Whirling, like the derwishes, serves to open these areas and stimulate the energies in these glands. Flutes, nays and oboes achieve the airy effect required to activate these areas.

The mervlana or whirling derwishes become very healthy and muscular from spinning, without any other exercises. This is because all the chakras are energised and the speed aligns their energy centres.

Dance moves: Turns, spins, veil work

Bellydancing to massage and rejuvenate internal organs

Dancers who wish to improve their health through bellydancing can practice the rolloing, circular moves slowly, rhythmically and with a relaxed deep breathing pattern. If you wish to try Chi Qong, Tai Chi or the slower martial arts, try a local centre or group. The Pulse 8 'Body Temple' program incorporates many bellydance isolations and rhythmic stretching moves with Tai Chi poses.

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