



## **Darvesha Victoria MacDonald, NM, USA**

When I found the Dances and Walks, I felt like I was stepping into a swirling Zendo: a place I could continue to do my Buddhist practice of self-witnessing, in action and sound. When I encountered “the glance” in the Dance Mandala, repressed, unprocessed grief arose. For several years tears continued to stream down my face as I looked into one loving pair of eyes after another. After living for years with the feeling that others found my sadness unacceptable, I gradually found that my

tears touched a similarly delicate place in others, and that showing grief is not something to be ashamed of, but a gift.

So I know, from my own experience, that the Dances create a transpersonal, therapeutic environment, where one can dwell in spacious awareness, witnessing one’s own emotions rising and passing, under the spacious glance of another who is there with acceptance, rather than rejection or agenda to ‘fix’ or change.

It all started on my way home after my first year in Asia. At some point that year, while doing a Vipassana retreat in a Thai temple in Bodhgaya, the stupendous gong from the neighboring Zendo shimmered through me. That was the moment I realized sound is not superficial, but a pervading vibration. It was earlier that year at Kopan Gumpa, when Jon Landaw demonstrated emptiness by bringing the striker together with the gong, that I understood emptiness. Now I wanted to explore the mystery of sound!

So, I was in a restaurant in Santa Fe, on my way home to San Francisco, when I saw an announcement for Saadi’s Lucid Voice class at the Mentorgarden.

In those days Saadi would often say, “Sooner or later you have to take your stand somewhere.” One night in class I glanced down at his papers spread out on a bench, and noticed the mission statement for the Dance Center. “I could commit to that!” And so I did. At the time I was studying conscious movement with various teachers. Naturally I was drawn to the somatic aspect of the Dances. I was also studying Deep Ecology, and found that I could share this philosophy through the dances. But for me the Dances are primarily a vehicle through which to share my understanding of Buddha Dharma, Interdependence, and Presence.

Eventually it was no longer enough to teach about it. I had to live it. I had to undertake what Gary Snyder calls "The Practice of the Wild" or "Practice of Place".

Ishan (my partner) and I live in the middle of the Gila Forest. Our front porch is set up for year-around outdoor sleeping, and 9 month-a-year cooking. The house is just back stage. Here I have a chance to break through the hallucination of separation from the nature that I am. This is the playground of Ziraat.

Here Nature is our book: The eerie night cry of the mountain lion; waking up in the mornings to intersecting birdsongs, as well as calling cards left by the trickster coyote that we have never seen; the earthy grunting of the javelina coming after "my" flowers; the casual amble of the bear, indifferent to us; the dance of the Wild Turkeys on Thanksgiving day; the peace that descends with the silent landing of the blue green heron at the water's edge; the different dialects the wind speaks through the various species of trees; the different songs the stream sings as it swells with rain and then subsides again; the scent of the earth after a night of intermittent rainfall; a delicious dip in the stream, after a hot summer day of work on the land; and taking up my shopping basket and walking over to the garden to harvest the spiritual gift of tonight's dinner.