

# Tiffany Montavon: Tiffany's Epiphany

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## Tiffany's Epiphany

*[Circle time: pay attn to prelude – what parts of your body you want to move:*

*Stretching*

*Sit rooted*

*Sit tall*

*Drop jaw*

*Reach arms up taller –*

*Drop one hand, lean*

*Come up*

*Other side*

*Reach behind, twist*

*Other side*

*tall spine*

*ankle on knee bend forward*

*other side ]*

One of the considerations from Celebration Circle for preparing to preach is to “invite each of us into a deeper connection with the Seekers’ Church.” Several of you have continued to check in with me on my call to working with “body theology” and invited me to show up with it at Seekers Church. I find these invitations both wonderfully caring and connecting, and irritating, in the way that accountability and invitation to community can be.

That is my second point (the first being to encourage our body theology of openness to God). This is an invitation to deeper

connection with Seekers Church, as best you can. Keep asking about the threads of someone's call, do not assume they are talking about it elsewhere, keep strengthening your connection to each other. Keep encouraging the imperfect lives around you.

That is exactly how I see my role as a Yogarhythmics teacher. I show up with my imperfect self, and I encourage other imperfect selves, without judgment. I want to tell you how much I love teaching YR, and to thank you for supporting me with the growing edge fund, and with allowing me to use this space to teach.

Recently a woman said "WOW" loudly as we were as we were dancing a mostly-arm dance. I checked to make sure she was okay; yes, she just had an "opening." I noticed she sat part of the next song out, with her head on her knees, and went to check on her. She had tears streaming down her face, and said she was giving a prayer of thanks; her shoulder had been frozen for a very long time, and finally just opened. She said it was likely because I had done very slow repetitive stretches at the beginning of class for several weeks in a row, always saying to follow your own energy; do what your body needs to do today. I only did that for several weeks because I needed to open up – it is my favorite stretch. She is 'free at last!' this again feels like holy work.

To give you some background, having never really danced in any capacity and never having taken yoga, I traveled to 10 countries in 1997. Seeing folk dance in almost every country moved me deeply.

I saw simple people coming together with simple moves – the gathered community. I saw a tribe of Berbers in the mountains of Morocco, dancing around a fire, barefoot in snow. I saw a Japanese harvest dance, Flamenco in Cadiz Spain and I saw Indian temple dancing. I wondered where this existed in US culture.

I tried social dancing here upon my return. Swing dance taught me I had arms, Latin dance taught me I had hips. Modern dance class taught me there were planes and levels to move in, and silence or space is imperative to the dance. I signed up for a weeklong flamenco dance camp at the Omega Institute. To prepare I took a 10 week beginner flamenco class with Ziva here in Chevy Chase. The advanced class was after my class. One day I slipped in just to watch, and Ziva looked at me with that haughty flamenco disdain and said, "No No! You go!"

In the way that exploring call happens, through failed flamenco attempts, I found Gabrielle Roth's Sweat Your Prayers movement practice, which in turn led to Yogarhythmics. They are essentially the same practice: get grounded in my body, move from inside out, use expressive free dance to explore relationship with myself and others, and ultimately our collective connection to the divine. It is a very spiritual practice.

In class, I am seeing how we show up as best we can: frozen shoulders, loose knees, unable to try a larger movement than we are used to, most often, aching to dance freely. Sometimes I will see a person completely hip-locked, and no amount of hip-invitations will unlock the story that lives there. These experiences are teaching me compassion. I am coming to see what sacred ground it is to invite people to explore their lives, stories, connections and their relationship to Spirit. Despite my imperfections as a teacher, it feels like very sacred work.

That is my third point: make sure you know the work you are doing out of the love of your heart is sacred. You are doing holy work. That may or may not make it any easier to show up; but know it in your bones.

I am particularly noticing how each person, including myself, relates to, explores and ultimately balances the masculine and feminine energies we each carry. This of course is simply

energy, having nothing to do with gender. Archetypally this is also very important work: think of the myths that invite us to attend to the “sacred marriage,” the union of our masculine and feminine selves.

On Monday, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, I was preparing for class, looking for music relating to freedom, justice, spirituals. I was surprised how many songs in this category from our North American culture were third chakra songs, or songs with masculine energy. For class, I ended up using a Maya Angelou poem at the beginning, her resounding feminist voice balancing the strong masculine songs I used in class. I wondered if justice work involves – necessitates – coming from the compassionate receptive side, and then moving forward with the vision and purpose on behalf of another. The music of the civil rights movement made me wonder if good justice work is by nature being Christ; being whole, being undivided.

Wayne Muller Says in his book titled Sabbath: In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between work and rest. I hear that as another invitation for our busy culture – me – to honor the masculine, the feminine, and find a rhythm, or even a balance between the two. Ultimately, we are seeking wholeness. To know this wholeness, I must know my feminine energy: who I am, my tribe, my roots and the land where I make my home. Moreover, I must know my masculine energy: my forward motion, my vision, my clarity.

This wholeness is Christ: Paul is speaking to the Corinthians and beseeching them not to be small minded; they should not be divided but be one in Christ. Do not quarrel about whose camp you are in and what importance that has. Rather, focus on Christ. “Has Christ been divided?” This might be a stretch to use the lectionary passage, but ultimately I believe the Christ invitation is to wholeness, not tribalness, for justice. Where are the “factions” in our own church, and how can we go about honoring each other and moving forward for justice.

Justice work is where my individual “body work” becomes the larger body. The ending of a yogarhythmicis class encourages our awareness of others, and our connection to all. Finally, we end in stillness, resting in the Divine.

I am beginning to see this small work of teaching YR as a tiny piece of justice work. I work for the just treatment of our bodies and spirits, to encourage our connection to the larger, and the Divine. From there, each person goes out to do their sacred work in their own way.

I want to remind you of the prelude music: feminine.

As a final image of the collective body of Christ, working for justice, Invite you to listen to this rap that the Ukrainian protesters used to demand a fair election. Can you imagine 10,000 people singing this in the streets?