



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister  
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## “The Bee Dancer”

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At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### Centering Thoughts

*Keeping step with that restless, rapid music, seasons come dancing and pass away.*

Rabindranath Tagore

*Dance, when you're broken open. Dance, if you've torn the bandage off. Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood. Dance when you're perfectly free. Rumi*

*Dance is the hidden language of the soul. Martha Graham*

*The flower doesn't dream of the bee, it blossoms and the bee comes. Mark Nepo*

### Sermon

Dance brought me to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens. It was several years ago that my African dance teacher told me that he was back in Athens at the UUFA to do a dance and drum workshop. I had spent a couple of years taking classes and performing for a few schools with him. I was happy to have the opportunity to hear the rhythm of the African drum and feel the African style movements once again.

My origins of dance began when I was five. My mom enrolled me in dance class. She thought dance would be a good recreational activity, something she had enjoyed herself when young. Wearing my black leotard, pink tights and ballet slippers, I learned to make shapes with my arms that were called the five arm positions: first, second, third, fourth and fifth. I learned leaps by jumping over my teachers shoe and pretending to be a blue bird. I learned the sequence of steps for the recital and performed them on stage dressed as a red poppy with my red leotard and tutu. After the recital, several people came up and commented on how well I had done; I was a good dancer. To me a dancer was someone who wore a leotard and tights and remembered her steps.

In middle school, I joined the intermediate company of a professional dance company. With classes two days during the week and Saturdays being long with class and rehearsal, dance became an important part of my life. I would eat, breathe, and dance. If I wasn't dancing in class, I was dancing down the aisles of the grocery store or the long hallway to my room at home.

The company performed Peter and the Wolf, and I had a solo as the Cat. I was allowed to embellish the choreography and create my own cat-like moves. I began to take ownership. I had always watched how cats moved and wanted to mimic them. During this time my parents bought me a skateboard, put me in karate classes, and other recreational activities. I always continued to dance. I was becoming a dancer. Dance was where I made my friends and found my place.

High school years brought changes and challenges. I no longer felt comfortable in a competitive ballet company. I went back to my original dance school. Being a dancer meant more than putting on the tights, memorizing the steps, and rehearsing all the time. It meant expressing a feeling, an emotion, part of what's inside. I was not ready for this. I did not know how to dance beyond recreation. I continued to dance as a beautiful flower bud closed with insides protected and unused.

In college I was working on a biology degree not knowing where dance would fit in until I discovered I could take classes with the dance majors. There I was fortunate to have a long time UUFA member Virginia Carver as my ballet teacher. I was also fortunate to be a part of Ms. Carver's dance outreach program called Non-Stop. In this program we used creative movement with the students. Creative movement teaches the elements of dance: make small shapes or big shapes, dance on a high level or low level, create a curved or a straight pathway. Students did not have to move exactly like the teacher. They could be individuals. I fell in love with this way of dancing. Ballet's fifth position becomes the shape of a flower bud. Second position becomes the flower blossom. It was a way to dance from the inside out.

After completing my degree in biology, I did not want to express my love for nature as a scientist, and I now had found a new form of expression through dance. So I began developing and teaching programs teaching science through dance. I felt a change, a reworking. The word recreation comes from the Latin *recreare* meaning to "create again" or "renew" or "restore." I taught programs on how butterflies go through a metamorphosis, how light forms a rainbow, how a flower forms a fruit, and how honey bees do a dance to show where the food is. Dance was restored in me, and the bee dancer was created.

In the honey bee's waggle dance, the scout bee goes searching for a nutrient rich crop of flowers. Then she goes back to the hive to tell the other forager bees. She expresses her information through movement. She explains the direction and the distance in her pathway. Through dance I am able to create my own pathways, searching out nutrient rich connections with others.

Several years ago I danced with a group of ladies with dance training. We used modern or contemporary dance to express our ideas, similar to creative movement. In the process we learned more about each other, encouraged each other's growth, and provided acceptance and understanding. There was authenticity expressed in our movements. Our spirits moved through our bodies. I created a dance about motherhood, titled "Under Mama's Wing." I imagined being perched in a tree with a mama bird and swapping stories of a mother's time, patience, dedication, and eventual need to let go.

Here at UUFA I have danced with the Goddess Group. We explored how we move as women in our daily chores and lives. We discussed feelings of body image and the storing and releasing of emotions. Through creative movement we discovered how words felt in our bodies, which parts of our bodies feel more comfortable with certain words. We made connections among our sisterhood in ways verbal dialogue could not.

Coming back full circle to when I first came to UUFA, I have danced with the Palms of Fire drum circle. We have shared African dance with not only the UUFA community, but the Athens community as well.

There is a saying that the eyes are the window to the soul. Maybe so, but I believe the soul is seen and expressed with a gentle gesture of the hand to a friend, or the locking of arms in a do si do with a partner, or the breath releasing undulations of the torso in African dance. Through dance I am able to express my love for nature, connections with others and respect for other cultures. Dance is a part of my spirituality, the way I see the world and connect to it. I want to stand along the side of the fiddlehead of the fern and unfurl with it, to live in the moment. Life is a series of movements or dances. It is my way of seeking out or foraging truth in my life.

As the bee dancer here today, I cannot tell you the path you should follow. No matter how much I waggle, I cannot tell you the direction or the distance to find your source.

I invite you though, to fly with me, to search with me and to dance with me.

### **Questions for Reflection or Discussion**

1. What makes you feel like dancing? Why? When? Where?
2. What keeps you from dancing? Why? Would you dance if no one was watching? Why?
3. How do you respond to someone who tells you that you don't look like a dancer, a singer, a model, {*insert your experience here*}?
4. What childhood dream do you wish you had pursued but didn't? Why didn't you? Is it too late?