

The Figure Eight Pattern in Dance

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There are many dance modalities that utilize the figure eight pattern in their movements. One of the best examples is belly dancing which links the feet with the hips and shoulders to create a specific pattern of movement that is either front to back, side to side or up and down. The origins of belly dancing lend themselves to support women in freeing up the body for opening the hips and strengthening the muscles throughout the body through the specific muscle patterns. In Tai Chi there is a similar set of actions to bring about whole-body movement that link from feet to hands and spine to head. Newer dance forms do not utilize this pattern unless being very specific, but you can see the movement in people who stand in a line waiting, they will often rock back and forth in a figure eight pattern. Or you can see it in play as children push a car along a race track, or draw shapes and forms, or as they spin and move in their own creative way.

One of the initiatives for the dance program this year was to provide a means for people to use dance to bring harmony into the body, to coordinate the whole-body experience of connecting through the ground with the feet, and extending muscle, tendon, ligament, and fascia strength through combined and integrative methods. Ballet can be very linear in its approach, Jazz can be linear and abstract, Tap is very direct in movement flow with a focus on the feet and a secondary focus on the body. So, how do you bring the figure eight pattern into focus? A good creative, intuitive question.

The Wishing Jar dance was developed with two ideas in mind. First, the ability to set intention and bring focus to dreams, desires, ambitions, goals by placing those definitive ideas or concepts into a jar. Some of the dancers have shared with me the meaning of each piece in their jar, the meaning of each sticker they have added to the outside, the emotions that they embrace with their jar, and the wholeness they are seeking in their picture. Depending on their age there is a flow of information that links to their jar. For parents of little people, it is a jar. To a little one, it is their whole being inside that jar and each figurine, sticker and gemstone is very specific and important. For the older dancers, they have added stickers to represent emotions, letters to represent words or feelings, cloth or pendants that have special meaning. It has been truly humbling to see the heart and soul that has gone into creating their piece. Providing the opportunity for people to create a wishing space is a life long skill that can be changed and enhanced as the dancer grows older.

The second ambition for the Wishing Jar dance is for the "forever" dance. This is a series of movements that are specific for harmonizing the body and that can easily be remembered and danced to any music and in any situation. As the jar can change, so can the movements. But for those dancers that choose to keep this dance in their memory and in their repertoire for wellness, they have something that can last forever. The movements in the dance create a synergy from the feet to the head. There is a focus on grounding, centering, gravity, balance and stability. These five reflexes are paramount for coordinating the body and finding balance in movement. The raising and lowering of the jar began as a simple movement but has begun to transform into a figure eight pattern that travels on a diagonal line that can pass through different directions. The spiral actions combined with whole-body movement bring a synergy through the systems and each stretch and lengthening opens up the meridian lines that pass through the arms, the legs and the torso of the body. The directions of travel include moving backward to the past, forward into the future, from side to side and look around in the present. The

movement through the foot changes weight through the toes, through the ball of the foot or the bubbling spring which releases tension across the joints, and the extension of the ankle provides a release of emotion that links to the limbic system in the brain. All of this from a few points and extensions.

What does the figure eight pattern assist with? Let's take a look at some of the latest research and writings that come from Energetic Kinesiology. Although we are dancing a flow from the foot through the hip to the extension of the fingertip, there is more than just the two-dimensional reference to a flow. The figure eight pattern is more than just a swish of the hand, there is a ribbon of energy that flows with information throughout the system.



The center of the eight is a cross-over of information and direction. In traditional Chinese Medicine they talk about the influence of yin and yang. That is a balance of positive and negative, as well as action, and flow. In the figure eight, a yang pattern runs one direction with flow, while the yin travels opposite, they cross over in the middle and exchange or create liaison points for the system. As well, the

ribbon is not flat but full and flowing, within its core are layers like the auric field that transfer energy about the physical body, lower body, mind and spirit, and then the higher body, mind and spirit. Anywhere within this loop can have a warp or a collapse, and in such a case the trajectory of the flow can be altered, and the information can be lost. As well, a shift of flow with yin and yang can create a beaver dam of flow where one flow can cross over into the other flow. To get an idea of this flow, look at the video of the yin and yang symbol at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FI3Eg5jKsaY>.

With a vision board, (as seen above), a marble can be pushed or rolled along the pathway with the yin pattern travelling down the middle first, and then the yang pattern going up in the middle next. If you imagine both patterns travelling together, you can see how they will share space and support each other when the flow is balanced. Very often children will try to trace both flows at the same time in an instinctive way on their own.

In our choreographies this year I have changed the formation of the dancers in relation to each other to create different shapes and pictures. I have also changed the props to change what is felt and experienced because of the prop. For our year end show some people will be using their wishing jar, some will have lanterns, stars, sabre swords, scarves...each one has the potential to change how and why the body can harmonize. This has been an intricate, interesting and thought-provoking project. I have never used the same choreography in a show, and repeatedly throughout the show. But I believe the audience will see and experience something completely different with each presentation. The goal, music and ambition of each class will also change the experience of viewing the dance.

There have been many skills to develop through this process as a dancer. Working with a prop is never easy, and for the little ones leaving the jar lid on or not picking off the stickers and rhinestones has been a challenge. For the older dancer, they have had to learn how to balance the jar or sabre without gripping the jar and maintain a balance throughout a spiraling movement. The release of the hip to flow with the hand and sweep through movement that is in opposition has been challenging. The arabesque has many different levels of achievement. As dancers have learnt to balance deeply on one foot, they

have also been working to raise the leg higher and higher to try and achieve the dance trick known as the “needle”, (this is a work in progress). Lastly, the develop (or unfolding of the leg) has been a challenge for flexibility, strength and balance all at once. This has illustrated who has practiced and worked on gaining the skill and who has chosen to just walk through it. Again, all will be revealed come show time. Directed walking and attention to direction of movement has been throughout the choreography and has challenged dancers to know where they are in space and how they need to move in order to quickly change direction or orient themselves to others.

One way that I can connect the whole group to perform together can be through the Feet First Foot Rub, but I can also do it with Cook’s Hookup, a figure eight exercise developed by Wayne Cook. This little exercise is great for gaining energy before getting out of bed or trying to go to sleep. It is a great pick up in the middle of the afternoon, or a way to sit when you are waiting and can be energizing at the same time. We have used this in dance to solidify our goals, come together as a group, to wait backstage for a performance, or to help in a stressful situation. Here is the protocol:

Cook’s hookups can also be helpful for this pattern. Goal setting, relaxing, energizing, calming and more can happen with Wayne Cook’s protocol. First cross the right ankle over the left or vice versa, then cross the right wrist over the left and turn the palms towards each other so that the fingers can link. Put the tongue on the roof of the mouth and breathe deeply for at least 60 seconds. Part two, place the ankles side by side, put the fingertips of both hands together and place the hands in front of the belly button. Keep the tongue on the roof of the mouth. Breathe deeply and hold this for at least 60 seconds. This can be done sitting, standing or lying down. It realigns the whole body. I use the body pendulum to shift weight with the second position when everything is aligned if I am standing. With dancers I ask that their bodies move forward when everything is aligned in the body. Our whole body warm up this season includes the Feet First Foot Rub, the Muscle Dance, the Meridian Sweep Dance, Switches and Cook’s Hookups. We can do all of this in 5 minutes and have the whole body engaged, strengthened, and balanced. As a group, by doing it together we are linked together and perform and think together.

Brain Gym International uses the figure eights to link up the hemispheres of the brain and coordinate the eyes and proprioception by tracing the eight on a picture or with a pen, or using the arm outstretched and imitating an elephant to trace a figure eight in space with movement through the feet and the whole body. In Touch for Health we assess the neural pathways for the eyes and can balance any areas of inhibition with a few simple switches and eye movements as well as some figure eight tracings.

The Tibetan Figure Eight Mini workshop created by Bruce Dewe and Joan Dewe provides many ways for the figure eight patterns to be assessed and then strengthened. This includes larger patterns and smaller patterns as well as spirals and vortices. Using muscle monitoring the areas of challenge can be identified so that a focus can be placed on these areas rather than doing a whole set of exercises that might not be necessary. This is a workshop that I love to teach and look forward to sharing with parents to assist their children with challenges, ailments and relaxation.

More information about the figure eight pattern can be found in:

“Tibetan Energy and Vitality Workshop” by Bruce and Joan Dewe and taught by a Touch for Health Instructor.

“The complete edition of Touch for Health” by John and Matthew Thie.

“Energetic Kinesiology: Principles and Practice” by Charles Krebs and Tania O’Neill McGowan