

Daily News & Analysis

Saturday, April 26, 2008

Most people are aware that dance in itself has therapeutic value. Of late, dance therapy is the use of dance movements to improve the mental and physical well being of a person.

It is founded on the premise that the body and mind are connected and that the state of the body may affect mental and emotional well being.

Movement comes from the participant and is very different from a conventional dance class where choreographed movement is taught. Although some instructors call themselves dance therapists, dance instruction is in fact quite the opposite of what dance therapists would do in a session. By observing and altering the kinesthetic movements of a client, dance movement therapists diagnose and help solve various psychological problems by getting people to express themselves through movement. Dance therapy can be used with various populations from patients with mental and emotional distress to individuals with physical disabilities. Dance movement therapy seems to have therapeutic value for the healthy person as well.

“I believe dance is therapeutic. Dance is the most fundamental of the arts involving direct expression through the body. Although it is very different from techniques used in dance movement therapy, it stems from the same premise that the mind does not disengage as the body engages.

Any kind of movement activity, be it running, jumping, yoga, dancing all have therapeutic effects on the mind and body,” says Dilshad Patel.

She further adds, “Dance has been an integral part of my life since the age of five. I trained in the Indian classical dance form of Bharat Natyam for twelve years, and then later had extensive training as a dancer and instructor at the Shiamak Davar’s Institute for the Performing Arts for another seven years. After having taught dance and exercise to various populations, I decided to further my education in the field of Dance Movement Therapy. While teaching dance to children infected with HIV, hearing and visually impaired, orphans and juvenile delinquents, I learned about the various challenges and rewards of counseling these children with special needs.”

It was then that Dilshad came across a dance therapist Tripura Kashyap who introduced her to the field of movement therapy. “I wanted to do more with dance, movement and fitness. After much research I decided to move to New York to pursue my education as a trained dance movement therapist. As part of my training program, I got an opportunity to observe and teach at various schools, colleges, psychiatric departments in hospitals and residential treatment centers for teens with emotional and behavioral disorders. I was also awarded a scholarship to be part of a work-study program at the Garth Fagan Dance School in New York (Tony award winner for his Choreography for the Lion King on Broadway). I now conduct wellness workshops and am able to help people through my varied educational background. I am blessed for being given an opportunity to work with such amazing teachers. My goal is to help individuals with difficult life situations using movement as a medium.”