

Morad's book is a self-help guide to wholeness for women from all walks of life. Daleela shares how belly dancing will increase your fitness level, prepare your body for pregnancy and help you to reclaim a healthy sexuality.

Belly Dance Wisdom

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Back row L to R: Sandy, Amira, Zibazan and Zahra. Center: Andrea. Floor: Daleela

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*For Fitness, Pregnancy and
A Divine Sexuality*

Daleela Morad

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Daleela and Daughter, Andrea

Introduction

More to Belly Dancing than Meets the Eye

Belly Dance as Therapy

The art of belly dance is for you! In the Middle East, *everyone* belly dances. In my travels to Egypt, I have witnessed men, women, and children of all ages, shapes, and sizes belly dance at weddings, birthdays, and other special occasions. Traditionally, mothers have passed this dance down to their daughters for generations. This ancient dance is a way for people in the

Middle East to express who they are as a people. Individuals dance together, often alongside the dancer, as a form of celebration.

In the United States, women from all walks of life also belly dance, for sensual fun, for therapy, and to create a larger sisterhood. Indeed, throughout many parts of the world including Europe, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Argentina and North Africa, this dance is a communal event, like a rock concert. It is a dance in which everyone participates by clapping or singing with the music, often getting up and dancing with the dancer herself. There is something very powerful about this ancient dance form that is alluring and transforming the world over!

This dance art will lend you an opportunity to get in shape and to strengthen your body, especially problem areas like your hips, thighs, and belly. However, what many people don't realize is that learning this ancient art is also about honoring the power and beauty of the feminine experience. If you are open to the possibility, learning to belly dance may then become your sacred dance journey. In this sacred journey, you will have the opportunity to heal from the deep wounds that bind you, regain a healthier sense of your sexuality, and connect to a larger sisterhood and a feminine spirituality sorely lacking in our culture.

Belly dancing is therapeutic, and this book concentrates on the power this art form possesses to heal and unify your being. As a professional therapist, I encourage and recommend that you belly dance. From my insights as an experienced mental health professional, in addition to my many years teaching women to belly dance, I have discovered I am in fact teaching women how to connect to the *core* of who they are as women. I am teaching women to not only love their bodies, but also to heal from deep pain and ultimately to express their feminine beauty and power. Many of my students share with me that they find belly dancing fulfilling in many areas of their lives. They discover that through belly dance, they unify their bodies, minds, and souls. They realize this because belly dance has something to offer at every level of their being. To say there is more to belly dancing than meets the eye is an understatement.

Belly Dance as Low Impact Aerobics

Physically, belly dancing is low impact aerobics. Your age, shape, size, or race doesn't matter. Belly dance will offer you a great cardiovascular and body-sculpting workout. You are never too old, too young, too fat, or too skinny to take up belly dancing. Because there are no high jumps or leaps involved, this dance is relatively easy on your joints and skeletal system. Belly dance affords you the opportunity to help you lose weight and to tone all the major muscle groups in your body. As a focused discipline, belly dance will help you develop strength, flexibility, coordination, grace, poise, and balance that you can then transfer to daily life. With this book, you will connect to your sensuality *while* losing weight. You will engage in a fun, fantasy workout program at least four days a week. In this fun, fantasy workout you will take on the role of a beautiful Egyptian dancer performing for the Great Pharaoh himself. I can't think of a more exciting workout. Can you?

Belly Dance for Pregnancy

Did you know there is strong consensus that belly dance originated as a birth ritual? In these pages you will learn specific belly dance movements to help strengthen the very muscles you'll need for a relatively easy pregnancy, labor and delivery. You will learn to love your incredibly rounded belly as a symbol of power and life! In these pages, I also outline a postpartum program for losing weight and for toning your abdomen *after* giving birth. Belly dance will help you before, during and after you give birth.

Connecting to Your Lost Sensuality

When you look at yourself in the mirror are you unhappy with one or more parts of your body? Well, I honestly don't know any woman who is happy with every aspect of her body! So please don't feel guilty. If you know such a woman, please send her my way because I would love to interview her for my next book!

In this book, you will learn not to buy into society's cult of beauty, or Western body politics. Because belly dancing represents all that is rounded, soft, feminine and sensual, this art form will lead you to a healthier acceptance of your natural female curves. The exotic allure of belly dance will lend an aura of mystery and beauty to your entire life. As a result, you will actually *become* more beautiful and more sensual.

Studying a new art form is always exciting, but learning to shimmy and dance with veils is nothing short of sheer fun! Belly dancing will transport you to an exotic place and an ancient time, thereby helping you let go of present-day worries, and inspiring you to achieve a greater sexual spontaneity. Belly dance is wonderful sex therapy. With a fun and exciting dance meditation, you will escape from the every day rigors of post-industrial life, returning sexually recharged and rejuvenated.

Reclaiming a Sense of Community and Sisterhood

In the Middle East, belly dance has been known throughout the centuries as a communal dance, as a way for people to express whom they are through their music and dance movements. In my travels to Egypt, I witnessed virtually every kind of person belly dance: men and women, young and old, rich and poor. Egyptians traditionally hire a belly dancer for wedding receptions. The dancer ushers in the bride and groom, and then performs at their reception, inspiring everyone to join her in belly dance. In Cairo, a celebration is just not considered a celebration without a belly dancer.

In the privacy of their homes, mothers have traditionally passed down this dance to their daughters for generations. In some parts of the Middle East, older women continue to teach younger women belly dance movements as an initiation into womanhood and as a means to strengthen the muscles they will need for childbirth. So it comes as no surprise that in Egypt, there is a well-known saying, "You can take away the Nile, you can take away the pyramids, but you cannot take away the belly dance."

In the West, there is also a strong communal aspect to the dance, a sisterhood inherent in the belly dance community. Most belly dance festivals, contests, books, and magazines are written and funded by women. Many women experience a sense of camaraderie otherwise missing in their daily lives. They dance with their friends, their daughters, and their mothers. They dance together not in competition for the sheik, but for the sheer joy of it!

God the Mother

With the appropriate focus and intent, this dance has the capacity to connect you to God, Goddess, or a Higher Power, thus serving as a moving meditation. Throughout this book, I honor the feminine aspect of God by inserting the word “Goddess.” By purposely inserting the word “Goddess,” instead of “God,” I am honoring an important, but often devalued or denied aspect of our “Creator”. I am honoring what society categorizes as feminine characteristics—characteristics both sexes possess to varying degrees, characteristics I believe “God” possesses as well. I am reframing these feminine attributes as powerful and needed forces in our society.

As a spiritual discipline, the dance will never leave you, lie to you, cheat on you, or let you down. If you nurture it, it will be your friend forever. With the appropriate focus and a healthy respect for the dance as an art and as a spiritual experience, belly dance can become your *sacred path* to feeling alive forever.

So, take your pick. Belly dance will be for you what you intend it to be. To say belly dance is just a sexy dance meant to entice men misses the point, a whole lot of points!

Most important, as you read the following pages, it is my hope you will begin to connect to the core of your feminine power by engaging in the dance exercises, or better yet through taking a real live class with other women! Through belly dancing, it is my hope you will experience the incredible wisdom and power of the feminine!

A Note for Men

There are many men who belly dance. If you are a man interested in this dance, you will easily find many websites geared toward men who belly dance. Although there are many fine male belly dancers, I write this book the only way I know how: for women, from a woman's perspective. Nonetheless, I encourage men to read this book and challenge them to learn all the powerful serpentine moves. Not only will this dance strengthen your muscles and make them more flexible, you may also find belly dance deeply therapeutic for your mind and spirit.

What's more, you will more than likely connect to a greater sense of your masculinity. This is because the dance has the power to awaken a sense of one's body and sensuality in *both* sexes. I know of a man who takes classes and even performs for this very reason. Other men take up the dance to connect to the female aspects within them, for we *all* possess both masculine and female characteristics. Or, a man may take a belly dance class simply to connect more fully to the woman (or man) in his life. So if you are a man, I welcome you to read my book or take a class and belly dance away!

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