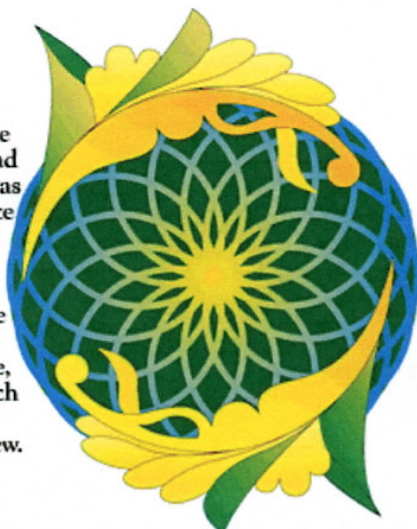


## BellyDance

Here is a more useful way to approach the pleasant discipline we call learning to dance. Instead of picturing the classes you take as a linear sequence, say Bellydance basics: Beginning, Advanced Beginning, Intermediate I, Intermediate II, Advanced/Performer ~ imagine yourself in an evolutionary process called the learning cycle, four distinct stages through which all human beings progress whenever they learn anything new.



## Info



First is Unconscious Incompetence. In this stage, you have had little experience of skill. In fact, it's likely you're quite bad, but because you don't know how truly bad you are, you don't feel bad and your self esteem isn't crippled. Yet.

True damage to self esteem and the false confidence that coexists with the bliss of ignorance, often occurs in the second stage of learning ~ Conscious Incompetence. As your awareness evolves into this stage, you begin to realize how little you know.

Perhaps you notice how impossible it seems for you to do much of anything smoothly. You certainly convince yourself that practically everybody at every class is so talented that you'd never think of dancing for the public. At least not any time soon.

In truth, Conscious Incompetence is a vital step in the learning cycle.

For once, your exaggerated sense of self loathing finds an equilibrium, you have the chance for some valuable self-assessment ~ you can begin to determine your strengths and weaknesses, and from this sense of where you really are, you can begin to focus on strategies for improvement. Much learning occurs here.

As your skills get better and your body works with your mind to integrate new steps and moves into your dancing, you evolve into stage three: Conscious Competence.

This is enjoyable and exciting for most people, because they not only start seeing themselves as good dancers, they realize how much they have learned. Others tell them how enjoyable they are to watch and that they've reached a certain competence, a reborn onfidence repairs their self-esteem.

Nevertheless, dancers in the Conscious Competence stage spend much of each class thinking about what move to execute next and how to balance the effort required to choreograph the next eight bars with the excitement of connecting with the musicians. Brains occasionally go on overload and feet still get frozen, but in general, onscious Competence is an enjoyable stage. Most people spend considerably more time here than in the first two stages. It is also a plateau where many dancers choose to remain.

True mastery isn't attained until the fourth stage of learning: Unconscious Competence. This is the place where there is little or no difference between what the body has practiced to perfection and what the mind has learned. You no longer think about your frame, or what move comes next. Instead, you're free to enjoy the moment and genuinely connect with the music. Those who manage to reach this level of mastery are sought after, indeed revered on the dance stage.

The trick is in getting there. Anyone who dutifully proceeds through the Beginning, Advanced Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced levels is pretty much guaranteed to reach stage three: Conscious Competence. After a year or so with any teacher drilling you with new steps and old jokes, you'll dance comfortably and actually have a good time.

To achieve **mastery** however, you may well have to abandon the linear approach; give up the convenient notion that simply progressing through a prescribed sequence of classes you'll end up a good dancer. When we think linearly, we tend to think in terms of quantity instead of quality. We make alienating comparisons:

- I want to learn slicker moves
- I'll only dance at this level, this is good enough.
- She's better than I am, I'll never improve.

or the newly bolstered ego boasts "*I'm better than most dancers in my class*".

The trap here is that you risk becoming a dance snob, a stylized technician with the moves of **Salome** and the heart and soul of **Medusa**.

When you achieve mastery or see someone else at this level, you know it within a few seconds. These dancers look exquisite, not better than you are, but as good as you can be. You've connected. Such mastery is an art form, a gift that will be given to future generations of dancers.

You can choose **mastery** just as you can choose to stay at level three. Both options are valid. If you opt for mastery however, part of the prescription is to start seeing each class and workshop not as a step in some infinite sequence, but as a timeless opportunity for learning. So what if you've taken all these different levels in the past. Take them again. Take them from other instructors. What you will learn will not be a published part of curriculum. You will find as you guide a less experienced dancer to new confidence and grace thru a rough spot you've been at, as you forget about your own footwork and simply enjoy moving with the music or musicians to a new level of competence, your own dancing will transport you to a place of uncommon joy. You will learn far more than you ever learned the first time through about dancing -- and about yourself. That's the real magic of any dance class, no matter how many times you've taken it. Don't give up because it seems awkward or impossible at first. Relax. You are in this to enjoy yourself as well as accomplish something. You have nothing to prove to anyone. It's just you and your body rediscovering how great it feels to move freely and sensuously.