

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a red top and a gold and red skirt with fringe, is captured in a dynamic dance pose. Her right arm is raised, and her left hand is on her hip. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

the Yoga

As spiritual beings living in human bodies we find ourselves in a time of great challenge and change, yet also great potential.

Time and space are eating us up, yet unprecedented possibilities are ours for the taking. Liberation from mental and physical blocks into free and gracefully flow-

ing living (sahej), is what the new yogic discipline, Shakti Dance®, can help us experience to find our way.

The Role of Shakti in Kali Yug

This Kali Yug or Steel Age, as termed by the Hindu Vedic scriptures, finds us wandering in the darkness of ignorance about who and what we really are and where we are headed. As we increasingly focus on the diversity of superficial existence,

getting lost in the erratic and frenetic chaos of modern daily life, we lose touch with our essence and the cosiness of being. This is the influence of Maya-Shakti, the force of illusion, distracting us through our senses and concealing reality beneath the festive display of physical phenomena. In this age, Maya-Shakti has the upper hand as she is said to veil three-quarters of essential truth. The other quarter is revealed by the illuminating force, Cit-Shakti,

the impulse of awareness residing in the heart of all beings, spurring us on

towards evolution and spiritual awakening. Maya-Shakti and Cit-Shakti are two sides of the same coin. Shakti is the Hindu feminine principle and goddess of all forms of energy and activity. She is the primal creative energy of the soul, consciousness made manifest and the divine breath through which all beings are inspired and animated. Without her, consciousness would remain formless and inert, and creation would cease to exist. Shakti's unmanifest counterpart and spouse is Shiva – pure consciousness, the underlying peaceful reality of our being, unfettered by the bonds of time and space. The goal is to imbue the dance of our lives with the serene awareness (Cit) of Shiva.

of dance

Shakti Dance® – A New Technology for a New Age

Words: Sara Avtar Olivier

Transformation of Shakti in the Aquarian Age

Within this Kali Yug we now enter a new astrological period, the Aquarian Age. This fundamentally heralds a great shift of consciousness. It is an age ruled by awareness, information and energy. The influx and overload of information in this computer age is overwhelming. In an era of sedentary, automated living, we are challenged to find new ways of dealing with life and regenerating ourselves. We need to develop techniques that will increase our vital energy and stimulate our ever-waning sensitivity, while increasing the stamina of our nervous system. Learning to consciously command our mind and effectively transform states of consciousness is essential if we are to avoid burnout. Developing the neutral meditative mind through yoga is key to enabling us to change gears of consciousness and to helping us navigate our way. At the same time an effective technology for transforming our inner energy, our Shakti, is paramount. Such a technology is provided by Kundalini yoga, as taught by Yogi Bhajan; and also by Shakti Dance®.

Nature and Origin of Shakti Dance®

Shakti Dance® is a "yoga of dance", offering a joyful, graceful and healthy yogic path through the conscious practice of dance. This discipline has been evolving since the early 1990s and is based

on Kundalini yoga. It was created and developed with the support and encouragement of Yogi Bhajan by Sara Avtar Olivier, lifelong dancer and 20-year yoga practitioner and teacher. Shakti Dance® shares the common goal with Kundalini yoga of expanding consciousness to unfold and manifest our soul potential (Kundalini Shakti) in daily life. Shakti Dance® embraces eastern and western dance styles, both classical and modern while primarily focussing on their underlying principles of form and dynamic, qualities and energy levels. The different moods (bhavas) and styles of dance then become a comprehensive range of "tools" from which to choose for a precise and balanced stimula-

tion of inner energy. Refining movement to form breath-linked flowing yoga asanas, Shakti Dance® opens and aligns subtle energy channels to heighten body awareness, giving a meditative and expansive sense of lightness, clarity and wellbeing.

The Dance of Life

The same principle of "rhythmic animating movement" that is attributed to dance is inherent to the vibration of the universe and all life. Just as creative consciousness is supremely expressed through the act of creation, dance is one of the most expressive forms of human activity through which the impulse of the soul can manifest. This simple yet profound truth is symbolised in

Hindu cosmology by "Shiva Nataraja" which literally means 'Shiva Lord of the Dance'. Shiva performs the "tandava" which is the dance in which the universe is created, maintained and resolved. His dance is Shakti. Together the "dancer and the dance" become the "lover and the beloved". Out of the duality of Shiva and Shakti are born the three "gunas". These are the three basic qualities of all life from which the entire universe is woven. They emerge from and influence the fundamental phenomenon of vibration (spanda). From them proceed the five fundamental frequencies or elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth), that give rise to all physical phenomena, our mind and our senses.

Photos: Marcus Biendi

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The System

Shakti Dance® uses the insights gained from yogic philosophy to awaken and embody universal principles of harmonious movement. The interrelated systems of the three gunas, five elements (tattwas), 8 chakras and 10 bodies, known to Kundalini yoga, are an enlightening basis for recognis-

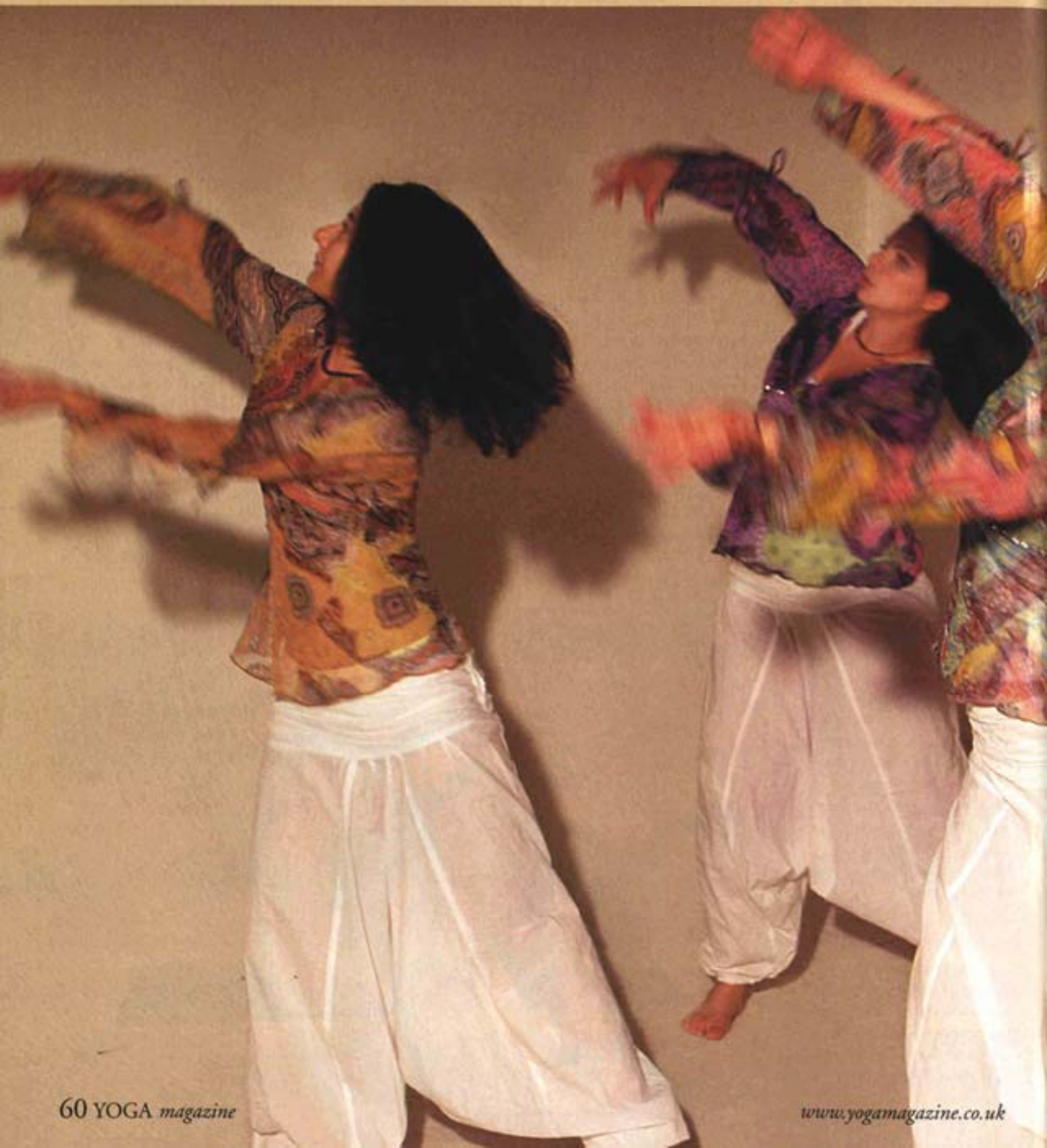
ing and explaining the qualities and effects of movements, positions and feelings (rasas) created through dance. Yogic anatomy also provides a map for explaining the movement and transformation of energy. Here Shakti's animating breath is described as flowing through the human body by way of an intricate network of subtle

energy channels (nadis or meridians). This vital form of Shakti is known as "prana". Together the network of pathways that convey it constitute the "pranic body". Mental balance and rejuvenation are directly dependent on the stimulation and equilibrium of the pranic body. A precise definition of a yogi or yogini is: one

who is able to control their three gunas, five elements and eight chakras at any time to reinstate perfect balance.

The Phases of Shakti Dance®

Through her extensive yogic and dance experience, Sara Avatar has been able to not only extend and systemise her spectrum of



Sara Avtar Olivier

Sara Avtar Olivier is the founder and creator of Shakti Dance®. A singer and life-long dancer, with training in a number of styles including ballet, jazz, salsa, Oriental, Indian and African dance. She has been practising yoga since 1987 and qualified as a teacher in 1990. Sara is also a certified Sat Nam Rasayan

healer and a KRI Kundalini yoga teacher trainer. Since 1992 she has been teaching and spreading the discipline of Shakti Dance® holds regular yoga and Shakti Dance® seminars and gives performances throughout Europe. Her intention is to use the creative arts as a doorway to access the Source and enhance soul-presence.

