

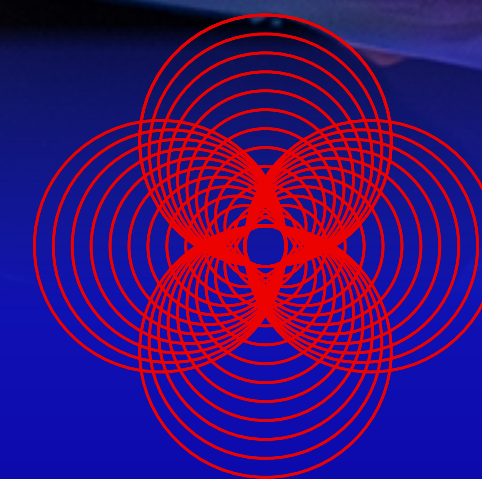


# Banafsheh Sayyad & NAMAH

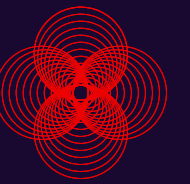
"Mind-blowing! Mesmerizing!"

Los Angeles Times

[www.namah.net](http://www.namah.net) >>>







## ABOUT NAMAH >>>

NAMAH is a non-profit performing arts company dedicated to presenting Iranian and world dance, music, and theater through public performances, educational initiatives, and community outreach programs. With a commitment to fostering cross-cultural understanding, NAMAH explores Iran's sociopolitical and cultural heritage alongside other societies that have endured significant socio-political turbulence. Through the power of performance, the company seeks to inspire critical thinking, deepen awareness, and build bridges between diverse communities.

The word Namah originates from the pre-Sanskrit language of Avesta, meaning reverence and greeting. The company was founded by choreographer and performer Banafsheh Sayyad with a vision to express the ancient within the contemporary and the sacred within dance, theater, and music.

Since its inception in 1994, NAMAH has cultivated a rich body of work that blends innovative movement vocabulary, rigorous dance technique, and the profound exploration of ancient mysticism. Under the artistic direction of Banafsheh Sayyad, the company has pioneered a unique artistic language that embodies the depth of Persian spiritual tradition while embracing global influences.

NAMAH has presented 10 original evening length works and numerous shorter works on tour across North America, Europe, and Australia since 2000.

The company has performed at prestigious venues and international festivals, offering residencies to colleges and universities as well as workshops and retreats, earning acclaim for its ability to transcend cultural barriers and evoke universal truths through movement and storytelling.

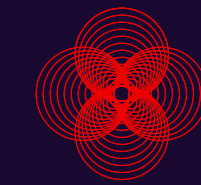
NAMAH has presented over 150 productions at venues including UCLA Performing Arts, Redcat, Japan America Theater, Plaza del Sol Performance Hall, Irvine Barclay Theater, Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, LATC, Broad Theatre, Youtube Theater, and LA County Museum of Art in Southern California; Palace of Fine Arts and Herbst Theater in San Francisco; San Jose Performing Arts Center; Houston Museum of Modern Art; Eisemann Center in Dallas; The Lincoln Center in New York City; Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium in Washington DC; Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago; Cambridge Multicultural Center and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; the Chan Centre in Vancouver, Canada; the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, England; Tanzhaus nrw in Dusseldorf, Germany; Mercat de Les Flors in Barcelona and Teatros Canal in Madrid, Spain among others.

With each performance and outreach program, NAMAH continues its mission to uplift, educate, and inspire, honoring the transformative power of art to bridge worlds and awaken the soul.

*"A group of performers who challenge stereotypes about Iranian identity, Banafsheh and NAMAH's work is entertaining and revolutionary, both."*

**Vancouver Sun**





## BANAFSHEH SAYYAD >>>

### ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CHOREOGRAPHER

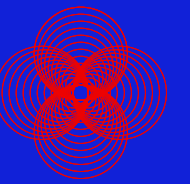
Internationally-acclaimed sacred dancer, choreographer, teacher and activist, Banafsheh has blazed a unique trail in contemporary dance “fusing ancient forms with a postmodern punch” (LA Times).” She founded NAMAHA in 1994 and has directed 150 productions, developed a network of artists, and created Dance of Oneness®. Banafsheh’s choreographic works include: *Amvaaj: Waves from the Unseen, Mirror, En/trance, Outer Circles, Into the Vast, Mehr be Mehr, Call to Love, Beloved, Luminous, Vivid Soul, Cycle of Fire, Axis of Love, Journey into Oneness, In the Fire of Grace, Fire of Love, Waves of Love, Iran My Mother, and Twilight of the Empress.*

Born in Iran, Banafsheh’s electrifying and wholly original dance style embodies the sensuous ecstasy of Persian Dance with the austere rigor of Sufi whirling – and includes elements of Flamenco, Tai Chi, and Gurdjieff Movements. Banafsheh is recognized for her fusion of high-level dance technique with spirituality. Rumi lives through Banafsheh!

Banafsheh is one of the few bearers of the authentic Persian dance form in the world, an innovator of Sufi dance previously only performed by men and a pioneer in a fusion style she has created called Dance of Oneness®.

A recipient of the Irvine Foundation Grant in Choreography, Banafsheh holds an MFA in Dance from UCLA where she taught Persian dance. Her solo work as well as ensemble performances with her dance company, NAMAHA have been presented extensively in festivals and by presenters in North America, Europe and Australia where she has gained tremendous acclaim. She performed in the closing night concert at the Festival of Sacred Arts at Teatros Canal in Madrid, and has performed and taught Master classes in a residency in the prestigious Dance Masters Series at the Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago, and at BYU in Utah. Banafsheh holds annual dance workshops in the US, Europe and Turkey, and tours the world with her performances and teaching residencies.





## PROGRAMS

### TWILIGHT OF THE EMPRESS >>>

Twilight of the Empress is a multimedia mythological musical which premiered at Cal State Northridge in May 2024, transports audiences into a mystical realm where storytelling, poetry, music, and dance converge to illuminate the eternal battle between light and darkness. **Featuring 7 dancers, a powerful orator, and 6 musicians**, this performance is a gateway to an otherworldly experience, transcending time and space.

"Much more than 90 minutes of entertainment, this is a voyage rich with feeling that surpasses all common sense. The bliss of the voyage converts into unstoppable applause at the end. The audience was driven mad!"

**El Pais, Madrid**

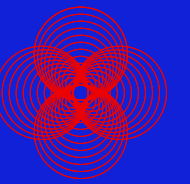
"The perfect way to open ritual aspects of Persian dance to a wider audience while preserving the sense of participating in something sacred."

**LA Weekly**

### OTHER PROGRAMS >>>







## PRESS

"Part whirling dervish, part flamenco femme fatale, sensuous and audacious, Banafsheh's dance is a mesmerizing foray into the body as trance mechanism; a DNA strand, supple, fluid and noble, come to life."

**Victoria Looseleaf, Los Angeles Times**

"Banafsheh is one of the greatest sacred dancers I have seen."

**Deepak Chopra**

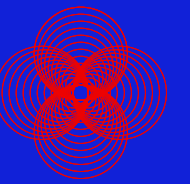
"Spectacular! Banafsheh has mastered the lore of traditional Persian, Flamenco and Tai Chi. In her bravura improvisational solo Search, she gloried in her hard-won technical prowess: initially swirling a translucent veil in complex patterns as she whirled, then lashing her hair rhythmically, next striking deeply sculpted flamenco poses accented with bursts of authoritative footwork and finishing with bold, mercurial undulations sustained by a spectacular command of balance."

**Lewis Segal, Los Angeles Times**

"SPECTACULAR...Banafsheh opened our vision to new dimensions ... with complete mastery of her body, she exuded power down to the tips of her fingers."

**Badische Zeitung**





"Startlingly beautiful whirling dervish moves. If the television show, Are You Hot? had a fraction of the heat that choreographer-dancer Banafsheh and her all female NAMA generated at Japan America Theater, the show would have been a hit. Talk about sensual: Iranian-born, locally based Banafsheh, a purveyor of trance dancing and unabashed hair tossing, presented En/trance, two hours of exotic music and dance that fused ancient forms with postmodern punch."

**Victoria Looseleaf, Los Angeles Times**

"Banafsheh embodies what it means to dance with abandon, what it means to fully live the ecstatic poetry of Rumi, of luminous moon- light on radiant silver clouds. Watching her dance is to glimpse something both otherworldly as well as fully grounded in the momentous meaning of the present."

**Felicia Tomasko, Editor, LA Yoga**

"Banafsheh presented a decidedly contemporary innovation to Persian dance, flamenco, trance states, and improvisation. In Axis of Love, Banafsheh took the audience on a simple journey of ascension as she slowly raised her arms, all the while spinning. It could be said it was like the earth spinning; or, like a flower opening up to reach the sky's rays."

**Monique Molino, Voice of Dance**

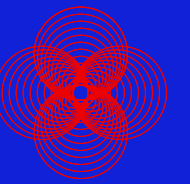
"From the very beginning of Banafsheh's performance, I realized that we are faced with something entirely different and distinctive from what has commonly been called Persian Dance. Banafsheh's dance was not only a highly artistic and virtuosic work both in terms of choreography and execution, but also for the first time I was witnessing a dance that one could call contemporary or modern Persian Dance – a dance with its own artistic language, neither Eastern like Arabic, Indian and Chinese, nor Western as in Flamenco, Modern European. This is a dance close to the essence of Persian culture with harmonious movement, insight, and deep connection to the music and above all, beautiful. The dance form created by Banafsheh Sayyad can be called the Banafsheh Dance. Much like how Lezgi Dance is reminiscent of Azeri culture or Flamenco is particular to Spain, Banafsheh Dance can be representative of Persian culture. Banafsheh Dance has another beauty, which comes from being born in a period where dance is forbidden in our country. In essence, Banafsheh Dance is a heartfelt expression of our cultural and artistic needs that have been long oppressed. Luckily, unlike most of our modern music, both inside or outside of Iran, Banafsheh Dance is not backwards and regressive artistically, it is actually advancing on the path of becoming international."

**Javanan, a weekly Persian Magazine published in Los Angeles**

"Banafsheh opened our vision to new dimensions ... with complete mastery of her body, she exuded power down to the tips of her fingers. She has the ability to combine different traditional roots to create one expression of dance and movement. Her uniquely fluid and supple hands and arm movements fit perfectly to the crystal clear and transparent music."

**Badische Zeitung**





"NAMA's performance is much more than entertainment, it is a voyage rich with feeling that surpasses all common sense. Banafsheh's movement is intensely meaningful as if calculated to the smallest millimeter. This is not a replica of traditional Persian dances; it is an innovative fusing of the tribal, the ancestral, and the modern. The audience was driven crazy and couldn't resist moving their heads, shaking, and breaking into a clapping rhythm while the music accelerated and the trance converted into a shared climax throughout the concert hall. All the way from the balcony to the orchestra, the audience followed the rhythms with their feet, rotating their heads in circles and whistling. The music came to a robust stop and the lights got brighter: the soul, that had escaped from the body, returned in a peaceful stature. The bliss of the voyage converts into unstoppable applause."

**Miguel Perez Martin, El Pais, Madrid (Spanish newspaper)**

"Banafsheh's Prayer #7 was interesting to look at. The stylized and syncopated bowing, spinning and trance-like hair-tossing of 3 black clad women had variations that became mesmerizing."

**Jennifer Fisher, Los Angeles Times**

"The highlight of the night was Banafsheh ... who was amazing to watch ... she danced fluidly enough to be part of the music. She depicted the ultimate Persian woman. She moved perfectly in circles for an entire three minutes without a flaw. She resembled the whirling dervishes of Sufism who spin in a trance to reach the point of perfect meditation."

**Sadaf Baghbani, Red Magazine, Salt Lake City**



"Prayer #7, a breathtaking trance dance by Banafsheh and the two dancers of her NAMAHA, would be right at home in a modern dance concert. Though never touching, the dancers stayed in touch – with one another and some force that propelled them. Banafsheh's solo, Axis of Love impressed because of her pure and transparent response to the music as performed by the fabulous ZARBANG whose work proved to be one of the evening's many musical highlights."

**Rita Feliciano, SF Bay Guardian**

"NAMAHA from Iran confirmed the power of musically focused, non-narrative dancing."

**Rita Feliciano, Dance Magazine**

"Banafsheh and NAMAHA shone brilliantly at the Festival of Iranian Theater in Hamburg. They presented a stirring fusion of traditional Persian dance with magnetic sufi spinning and the powerful stomping of flamenco to an enthusiastic crowd."

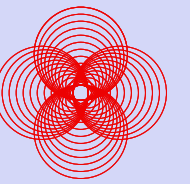
**Houshang Mahmood, The London Kayhan (UK newspaper)**

"Banafsheh's trance dance, Cycle of Fire, was mind-blowing. She is a font of exquisite perpetual motion, a temple frieze come to life, a one woman whirling dervish, trance spinning as she beckons us into her exotic world."

**Victoria Looseleaf, Los Angeles Times**







# SELECTED ENGAGEMENTS

## USA

UCLA Dance Department, Los Angeles, CA  
Redcat Theater, Disney Hall, Los Angeles, CA  
LA County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA  
Los Angeles Theater Center, Los Angeles, CA  
Henry Fonda Theater, Hollywood, CA  
Saban Theater, Los Angeles, CA  
Aratani Theater, Los Angeles, CA  
Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA  
Torrance Cultural Center, Torrance, CA  
Huntington Beach Library Theater, HB, CA  
Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA  
Neuroscience Institute, San Diego, CA  
Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA  
San Mateo College, San Mateo, CA  
California State University Fresno, CA  
The Dance Center of Columbia College, Chicago, IL  
University of Chicago, Chicago IL  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA  
Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center, Boston, MA  
University at Albany, Albany, NY  
Tilles Center for the Performing Arts, NY  
Fashion Institute of Technology, NY  
Alwan Center for the Arts, NY  
The Abode, New Lebanon, NY  
Brigham Young University, Utah  
University of Memphis, Memphis, TN  
Madonna University, Detroit, MI  
Centro Austriano, Tampa, FL  
Conant Center, Atlanta, GA  
Post Theater, Atlanta, GA

Duke University, Durham, NC  
Eisemann Center, Dallas  
Glen Echo Dance Complex, Glen Echo, MD  
Hollywood Performing Arts Center, Miami, FL  
Knights Center, University of Miami, Miami, FL  
Museum of History & Industry, Seattle, WA  
Old Dominican University, Norfolk, VA  
West Charleston Performing Arts Center, LV, NV

## SPECIAL APPEARANCES

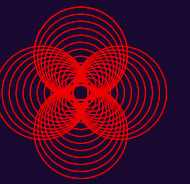
ABC Home with Deepak Chopra, New York City  
Esalen Institute, Big Sur, CA  
Kripalu Center with Coleman Barks, Lennox, MA  
Omega Institute, Rhinebeck, NY

## INTERNATIONAL

Chan Center, UBC, Vancouver, Canada  
Capilano College Theater, Vancouver, Canada  
Centennial Theater, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
Kaymeek Centre, Vancouver, Canada  
Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada  
Toronto Performing Arts Center, Toronto, Canada  
Jane Mallet Theater, Toronto, Canada  
John Bassett Theater, Toronto, Canada  
Salle Marie-Gerin Lajoie, Montreal, Canada  
Concordia University, Montreal, Canada  
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada  
Orpheus Theater SALT, Calgary, Canada  
Lordag, Gothenburg, Sweden  
Dorothy Winstone Theater, Auckland, New Zealand  
Milner Library Theater, Edmonton, Canada

Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, England  
University of London, England  
Tanzhaus, nrw, Dusseldorf, Germany  
Alte Feuerwache, Cologne, Germany  
Gallus Theater, Frankfurt, Germany  
E-Werk, Freiburg, Germany  
Kultur Verein, Karlsruhe, Germany  
Gasteig, Munich, Germany  
Musik Halle, Hamburg, Germany  
Audirix, University of Hamburg, Germany  
Odeon Theater, Vienna, Austria  
Tropentheater, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Delft Aula TU, Delft, Netherlands  
Salle Centrale Madeleine, Geneva, Switzerland  
Musikhalle, Zurich, Switzerland  
Plaza Del Sol, CSUN, Los Angeles, CA  
Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium  
Mercat de Les Flors, Barcelona, Spain  
Paruquea del Retiro, Madrid, Spain  
Puertas de Castilla, Murcia, Spain  
Teatros Canal, Madrid, Spain  
Templo Debod, Madrid, Spain  
Centro Culturale Candiani, Venice, Italy  
Caerana di San Marco, Treviso, Italy  
Teatro San Fedele, Milan, Italy  
Cosmopolite, Oslo, Norway  
Kulturkirken Jakob, Oslo, Norway  
Sodra Theater, Stockholm, Sweden  
Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden  
Karralyka Centre, Melbourne, Australia  
University of Technical Science, Sydney, Australia





## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH >>>

Banafsheh Sayyad works with presenters to create dynamic educational programs for youth and adults. These programs provide the opportunity for dancers and musicians, non-dancers and musicians, artists, health and education professionals, and members of the community to experience dance and mysticism in a variety of ways. Banafsheh Sayyad's educational programs have been presented in schools, colleges and universities, museums and cultural centers.

### **Residencies**

Banafsheh and NAMAHA present residencies that include performances, master classes, and workshops for all ages. The artists have had residencies at The Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago; BYU in Provo, Utah; and annually at The Tanzhaus nrw in Dusseldorf, Germany since 2005.

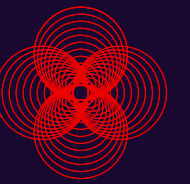
### **School Assemblies/Performances**

Banafsheh and NAMAHA's interactive assemblies and performances provide K-12 students exciting experiences of participating as audience members of a live performance either in the familiar setting of their school or in a theater setting. Programs are combined with historical and cultural information on Persian dance and typically last 35-60 minutes.

### **Youth Activities**

These are geared towards simultaneously entertaining and educating youth about dance, music, Persian culture and history, diversity and inclusion. These classes emphasize the development of each child's natural sense of creativity and individuality while learning technique.





## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH >>>

### Lecture Demonstrations

Banafsheh and musicians engage in lecture demonstrations in a variety of settings.

Topics include:

**Sufism**

**Sufi Dance & Music**

**Persian Dance & Music**

**Women's Expression in the Middle East**

**Dance Activism**

### Pre- and Post-Performance Question & Answer Sessions

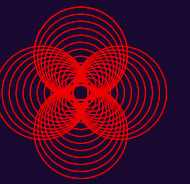
One of Banafsheh's favorite outreach activities, these sessions provide an opportunity for audiences to talk to the performers about the work.

"The dance we learned was, and is, a wonderful way to embody the love that WE ARE, so that we can remind the world of who they are, so that we can all Dance in Oneness and for all to BE THAT. I am deeply grateful for Banafsheh's vision and truth and sharing this with so many.

**Susan Beayni, Workshop Participant from  
Toronto, Canada**







## DANCE OF ONENESS® >>>

Dance of Oneness® is a healing, Spirit based dance modality created by Banafsheh Sayyad in 2005. A certification program, Dance of Oneness® is dance as a spiritual path and science of embodiment—a joyful, loving and contemplative way to embody Spirit and live freely, peacefully, passionately and of service in the world. Working in 3 dimensions: the art of dance, rigorous technique and self-expression; wisdom teachings; and healing; Dance of Oneness® is based in Sufi ritual and whirling, flamenco, Persian and Modern dance, Tai chi and Chi gong. Sufi teachings and the poetry of Rumi, Divine Feminine wisdom, Science of Mindfulness, the Gurdjieff Work, Chinese Medicine and the Chakra system are the theoretical groundwork.

In Dance of Oneness® sessions, Banafsheh weaves a nurturing yet rigorous blend of guided and free-style dance, stillness, whirling, healing movement, Rumi's poetry, mindfulness techniques, chanting, stretching, meditation, wisdom teachings, a sharing circle and lots of laughter.

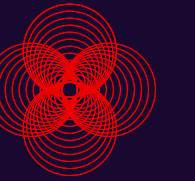
Banafsheh has taught Dance of Oneness® internationally since its inception across North America, Europe and Turkey at prestigious centers like UCLA, CalArts, Cal State Long Beach, CSUN, and Esalen Institute in CA; Kripalu Center in MA; The Dance Center at Columbia College in IL; BYU in UT; City College of NY, Integral Yoga Institute, Omega Institute and Menla Retreat Center in NY; Duke University in NC; Hollyhock on Cortes Island, BC; Center of Unity in Switzerland; Chartres Academy in France; Lucia Yoga in Spain; and Tanzhaus nrw in Germany among others. She has also taught extensively online at the Shift Network.

### **Format**

Offered both in person and online with and without live music.

Sessions range from one hour to seven days and can be delivered over a 1-month to 12-month period.





# DANCE OF ONENESS® >>>

"Dance of Oneness was one of the best experiences of my life. Banafsheh is one of the best teachers and human beings I have ever encountered. Her work is of the highest level for healing, transformation, love and awareness."

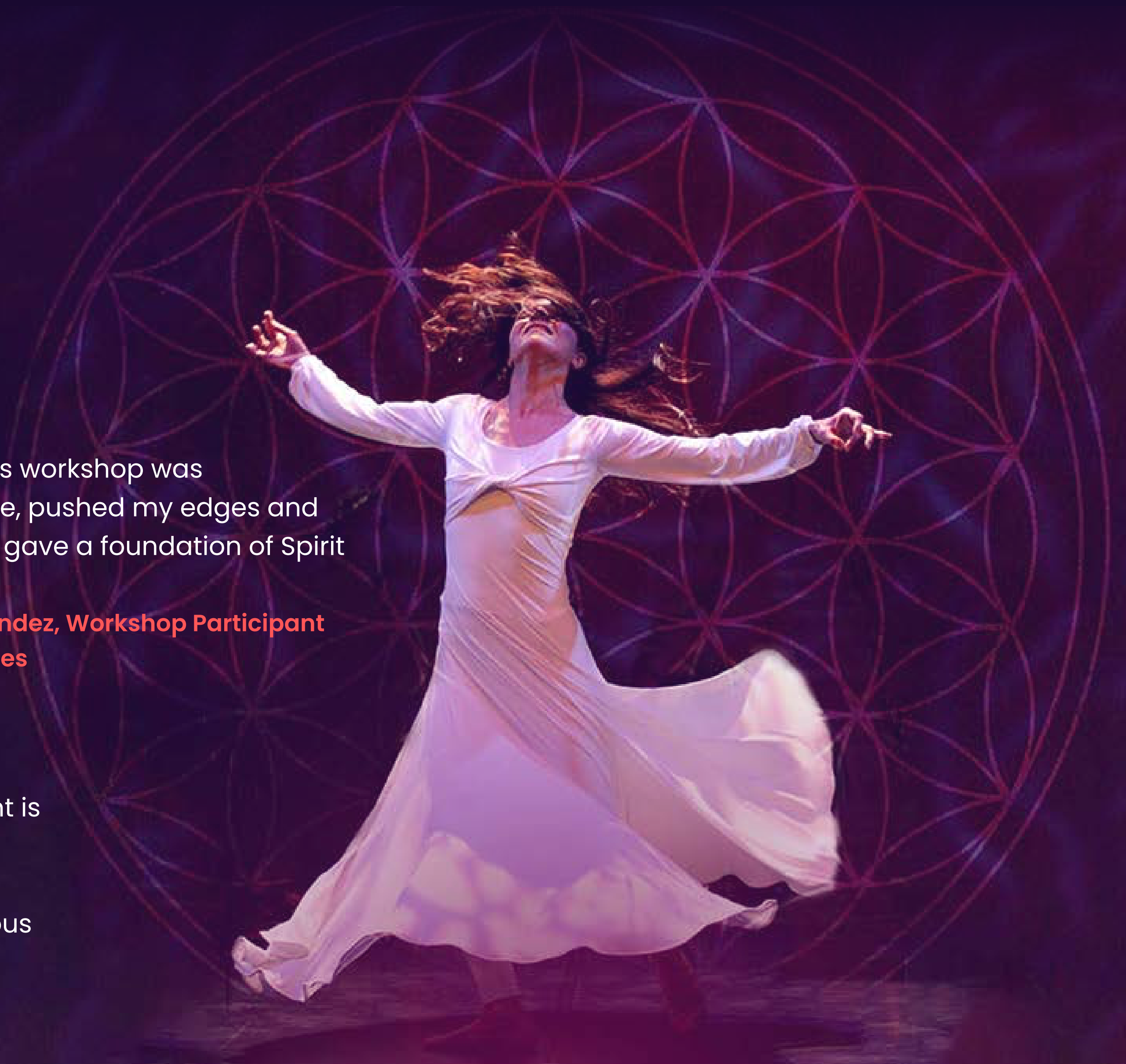
**Jewell Rosen, Workshop Participant from Boston**

"Amazing! This workshop was transformative, pushed my edges and capacity and gave a foundation of Spirit IN my body."

**Carolyn Hernandez, Workshop Participant from Los Angeles**

"Dancing universal truths! Banafsheh's integration of love, purpose, and embodiment is evident in her teaching and her being. I think what will stay with me the longest is the experience of Banafsheh's loving and generous presence."

**Diane Knoll, Workshop Participant from NYC**







# Banafsheh Sayyad & NAMAHA

Contact Us

Visit our Website

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