

# It Takes Two to Salsa

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## Excerpt from Soul Secrets of Salsa by Claire Timberlake

After dancing with me a couple of times, during one of my private lessons with him, Mike stopped to say that it took him more energy than necessary to lead me. He said that I became tense and made myself “heavy” to lead. Then, before I had a chance to think, he added that he knew that my latest dance partner and the one before him were very strong leaders. And I thought, “Yes! That’s right! The reason I am heavy and hard to lead is because my previous dance partners threw me around like I was a sack of . . . .” Actually, I had never minded the strong leads. I was used to them. But since I was being accused of dancing like a dead weight, I was relieved to have some direction in which to point my finger.

One of my previous Salsa partners, who hadn’t yet mastered English, once started a statement with “When I danced you . . . .” The phrase was more a Freudian slip than a syntactical error, I think, since he did “dance me”. To be honest, all of my former dance partners, for the most part, “danced me”. They so forcefully led me that I was more like a puppet than a dancer. They were such strong leaders that I was usually pulling back for fear of flying across the room.

If you are thinking, “Why did she attract especially strong Salsa leaders? Was she insecure about her dancing? Was she scared to rely on herself when on the dance floor?” The answer to those questions may be “yes”, but the questions are what are important here. If you asked why I attracted someone into my life, you know it “takes two” to create any situation in a relationship. If you ask which came first, the chicken or the strong leading dance partner, I’d say that it doesn’t matter. What matters is what I do with what I have control over now.

At a later lesson, Mike again mentioned my heaviness as he led me. This time I was poised and ready to bring the subject around to the guys who made me that way. But Mike was sounding different this time. He was now telling me that if I didn’t “tense up”, my partner wouldn’t have to lead me forcefully. “Wait!” I thought. “Remember last week when they were the ones who did this to me? They made me this way. Remember? Remember what you said last week? What happened to that?” Then Mike said something so painful to me that I can barely write it . . . . He said that he noticed that when Steve dances with other women now, he is not as forceful as he used to be with me. That hurt. I’m the one who was dancing with Steve when he was too muscle bound to be leading anyone, when he wasn’t even “on beat”. Where would he be without me? It’s funny because I was ready to see my ex-husband treat a new wife better than he treated me, but the thought of my ex-dance partner having an easier time dancing with other women, hurt. Sometimes when Mike is saying a divinely inspired comment, the significance of the statement in my life doesn’t hit me until after the lesson. But as Mike was talking this time, I found the relevance of his words immediately. I had known this phenomenon in my relationships off the

dance floor. Whenever I want to blame someone for something, I have an opportunity to see my part in whatever the situation is. I hate how that happens. I never get to be the victim. During early motherhood, I had a friend whose comments began to bother me. She and I used to judge the school system. We spent much of our visits criticizing schools and the way children were treated in them. After a while in this friendship, I felt like I was also being judged. When my kids wore sandals that, unbeknownst to me, were made by child labor in some developing country, I felt my friend's judgment as she let me know that she knew where they were made. Another time I felt her judgment as I brought my kids' lunch to the park in plastic bags. And well, as a rule, I didn't quite provide a life for my kids as natural as she provided for hers. One night before we had a camping trip together, as I lay awake defending myself in my mind over the things for which I might be judged during the trip, I developed an excruciating ear ache. Finally, after hours of pain, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I yelled in my mind, "I'm not perfect! And neither are schools and neither are teachers! We are all doing the best we can!" I honestly put a complete halt to judging schools and teachers (and anyone else), because I truly believe we are all doing the best we can. After this declaration (and my change of thoughts) my earache subsided, and a few days later my friend found out that she and her family were being transferred overseas. From then on whenever someone was bothersome to me, I found that the person would change or disappear if I changed my thoughts and actions. The bothersome people were only reflecting me. This "man in the mirror" process works every time, and I appreciate the people who have come into my life to reflect me and help me become a better person. The first time I noticed this phenomenon in parenting was when my young son, who was probably around twelve at the time, seemed to be consistently eating too much. He wasn't learning this behavior from me, I thought, because I was a closet overeater. He didn't see my binge eating, because I was a firm believer that parents shouldn't share their addictions with their kids. (I didn't know at the time that what kids see and hear is only half of what they are picking up from their parents.) I didn't want to say anything about my son's overeating, because in these times we know better than to bring up that touchy subject since it might cause more over-eating or worse (too little eating). What I did was change my behavior. I started eating less, myself. After I stopped my closeted binges, my son, soon thereafter, slowed down his eating to a natural pace. He didn't see that I was eating less, but because I was, his behavior changed. That's when I realized the power of my actions when no one could see me. I started to use this "man in the mirror" strategy with all three of my children. Whenever they were displaying some behavior that I didn't think would be beneficial for them, I didn't say a thing. I just changed my own behavior, not in front of them, but when they weren't looking. Then they changed their behavior accordingly, without realizing it. For example, when my oldest daughter was around twelve years old, she began classes at a more advanced dance school than where she started. She was dancing beautifully in class, but near the end of her classes, when the higher level dancers came in to wait for their class to begin, my daughter was afraid to dance. She didn't want to be watched by the older, more advanced dancers. She started wanting to miss dance class because of her fear.

This was frustrating for me, since I hated seeing her afraid to do what she loves to do. I knew that you can't force someone to do what they are afraid to do, so eventually, I stepped back to look at myself in my metaphorical mirror. I recognized that my daughter was doing the same thing I was doing. She had never seen me dance Salsa, so she had no idea that I was also afraid to dance when better dancers were standing around watching the dance floor as they waited to get on it. Seriously, I would become a nervous wreck in my mind if any of the advanced dancers looked my way. It seems ridiculous now that I cared, but a bit of teenager was coming out in me at the time. It's odd that I didn't immediately see my reflection in my preteen when she was afraid to dance, but it usually takes me a while before I see my reflection in someone else's behavior. Once I realized she was reflecting me, I knew I had to get over my fear in order for my daughter to get over hers. I had to make a change. Keep in mind that I did not tell my daughter about my fear or about my plan to get over it. She was in her own little world, as she should have been as a little girl. I remember the night I was dancing at Elvia's, a quaint restaurant with red and white checkered table clothes and a cement dance floor, when some better dancers walked in. The more advanced Salsa dancers come in later in the evening at all Salsa clubs, just as the better ballet and jazz dancers come to the later classes at my daughter's dance school. Of course, as fate would have it, these veteran Salseros stopped to watch the dance floor and were looking my way, possibly because there was nowhere else for them to look as they staked out the dancing situation or possibly because my partner was being watched by the better dancers since he was becoming one of them. My heart started to pound, but I actually felt exhilarated while I was feeling scared, as I danced within their view. I

knew I was doing this for my daughter. I felt the fear and did it anyway, as Susan Jeffers suggested in her book. I kept dancing in front of the better dancers that night and the following nights. It took only a short while before I noticed my daughter doing the same. All of a sudden, it was as if she never had the fear. This "man in the mirror" strategy has worked for me, with amazing results, as a parent. I never had to "discipline" my children. I knew they were usually reflecting me if they did something that was not advantageous for them. I had to change myself, without them realizing it, to get them to change. My awareness of my part in every problem, made it easy for me to raise children who are happy, successful, and endearing to other people. The "man in the mirror" strategy worked in my other relationships also. I knew that I'm always to blame when someone in my life irritates me, but as Mike was teaching me that "it takes two to Salsa", I had an issue going on for which I had failed to see my responsibility. At that time, the neighbors who lived above my condo were waking me up each night when they were doing what sounded like wrestling on their floor. I didn't know what was going on at first, except that I would awaken to a loud thud in the middle of every night and would stay awake, hearing consecutive thuds. I wrote them a note, asking them to do whatever they were doing in another room (not the one directly above my bedroom). They were quiet for a night or two, but they got back to their sleep depriving activity again on most of the following nights. One night, I finally realized what was going on. The man, of the partnership, was abusing the woman. So, I called the police. When the police arrived, the woman told them that nothing was wrong. Almost every night the man would physically

abuse her, and on four different nights I called the police. Each time, after she stopped crying, she would answer the door and act like nothing wrong was happening. I carried a hotline phone number for victims of domestic violence whenever I was outside, in case I ran into her when she was alone. I didn't know what she was up against, but I wanted to help. One day, I got to talk to her when she was by herself. She thanked me for calling the police and trying to help her. She was afraid that he would kill her, she told me, if she complained about the beatings. Then, to my surprise she said something to the effect that she didn't know why she attracted someone like him into her life. She was wisely taking responsibility for her unhealthy relationship. She sounded intelligent and psychologically astute. I was quite impressed. But the abusive nights continued. Eventually, I stopped sympathizing with her and just wanted some sleep. I tried to get them evicted, but after weeks of documenting their disturbances, and reporting them to the condo association, I was getting nowhere. I was feeling like the underdog as it was my word against someone else's. At one point, the couple above me and their landlord ended up with a prospective court date. The abusive nights above me continued as the court date loomed in the oh so distant, sleepless future. Before the court date, I finally decided to figure out how I was attracting this disturbing situation. I remembered a technique, which I had learned years before, to use if I want to see how I attracted a troubling person in my life. First I needed to write down what was really bothering me. At this point, besides the lack of sleep, I was bothered that this woman, who seemed intelligent and psychologically astute, was letting a man abuse her. So I wrote that down. Then I erased her name and put "I" in the place of it. So, basically I wrote "I, someone who seems intelligent and psychologically astute, is letting someone abuse me".

Now you're thinking that that is really farfetched and not at all true (or at least I hope you think I am too smart to let someone abuse me), but there was something that was happening to me occasionally, which I never told anyone about. Every once in a while, I did let a certain person emotionally abuse me. It would happen whenever I would park my car in his driveway while I emptied my car of my kid's groceries. This man could have called to tell me that he was on his way home early, so that I could move my car in time, but he didn't. If I didn't move my car before he came home, he would throw a fit, just like the man in the condo above me, but from inside his car. Both men (the one above my condo and the one behind my car) would stomp their feet and yell. While my car was in the way of his, my abuser would also honk his horn. I was a seemingly intelligent, and psychologically astute, woman who let this happen to her. Once I realized what I was doing, I knew I had to change my thoughts and behavior to get some peace and quiet above my condo. I did not want to face the angry man in my life or discuss this issue with him, so I decided to use the clearing method I learned from Joe Vitale in Zero Limits, called "Hooponopono," which, as I have mentioned, has stimulated miraculous changes in my life before. When I thought of this man who would occasionally throw a fit in his car, I would say "I am sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you, and I love you" to the Divine. Basically, I was apologizing to God (and myself) for letting myself be treated that way. It actually didn't take many days of doing this process before I was no longer yelled at and the people above me got evicted. I believe that they were finally evicted because I didn't need them to show me what I was doing anymore.

They didn't need to reflect me because I was no longer letting someone abuse me. Again I had learned that it "takes two" to have a problem like that. I had been yelled at because I let it happen. Someone else could have stopped the abusive situation by confronting the perpetrator. Good for them. I admire someone who takes the bull by his horns. I'm just more comfortable confronting the bull through his soul. After Mike's hint that "it takes two to Salsa", I realized that I can't blame my Salsa partner for the way I dance. The same is true in my life. I never have anyone else to blame for what happens to me or for how I am treated. I'm never the victim. I'm always responsible. Although it is usually disconcerting when I realize my part in any predicament I'm in, it is ultimately comforting to know that we can change our situation, and the people around us, by changing ourselves.

## *Soul Secrets of Salsa*

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