

## Welcome to Nia!

<http://www.niadivas.com/node/1406>

### **Jill:**

Lesley and I began to develop this very short introduction to Nia so that people could get a taste of what Nia feels like and also could learn a little bit about us. And so when you signed up for it on the website, we had three questions, so we're going to address those three bullet points that we have listed on the website as well.

Now, I'm going to review the first question, and then I'm going to turn the microphone over to Lesley to do the other two.

My name is Jill. I'm a black belt Nia instructor. I've been teaching for ten years - I took a little break - but I've been teaching for ten years. I was introduced to it in 1996, when I went to an aerobics instructor conference. (If you're not familiar with this, they have conferences for exercise instructors.) And I read this thing - Debbie and Carlos Rosas were presenting this thing called "Grace and Guts," and it sounded wonderful. So my first experience with Nia was in a hotel room, a convention room, with 200 other people! Let alone in Vegas! So that was my experience. I instantly fell in love with Nia.

So one of the first questions we wanted to address in welcoming people to Nia is:

### **1. What is the secret to fitness?**

I have "fitness" [written here on the blackboard] - but what is the secret to sticking with and enjoying exercise? Maybe you call it "fitness"; maybe you call it "exercise." Lesley and I call it "movement." And for us in the Nia Technique, what I truly believe in my heart is that it's joy and it's pleasure.

Our very first principle in Nia, the very first thing we study, is the first Nia Principle called the "Joy of Movement."

So here in Nia we will always encourage you to seek pleasure--to seek pleasure right away when moving. And as you seek it, as you choose to scan your body, it may say, "Oh, over here, I've got a little something going on," then we can tweak what we're doing to feel a little more comfortable.

So I just had a little knee pain happen. So if I'm doing my Heal Lead – this is a Nia move – and if I decide to go a little deeper, for whatever reason –I just want to! - and all of a sudden my knee goes, "You know, I'm not in pleasure right now," then I go, "Okay, I'm going to tweak it; I'm going to come up a little." And then I go, "Ahhh, that's in pleasure now."

So that's a state of staying in joy. And it's a little different than emotional joy. Of course, we want that too! And in Nia you'll see a lot of smiling faces. But this kind of universal joy of movement means that we're tapping into what the body was designed to do—move! And we want to tap into that for you today.

**Lesley:**

I started teaching Nia about two years ago after coming here and taking Nia classes for the year before that, and Jill was my first teacher. And for me I wanted movement to be fun, so it was love at first groove!

That was really interesting to me, so just really briefly talking about seeking pleasure:

Learning the choreography – and it is choreography – some of it just came right away, the body just does it. All right? You never know what it is. And other parts the body didn't do as readily. It took some time to learn. If you're moving your body and something doesn't make sense to your

body, it's perfectly fine to just stand or kind of wiggle around a little bit or move around a little and kind of watch to see what's going on, or just start with the feet. And that, I want to say, is part of the pleasure, and was part of my path then. Very much like learning to ride a bicycle, if there are moves that aren't coming as readily, all of sudden they're there. And that's definitely a feeling of pleasure. They all each have their own timing of when they come into your body. At least, that's been my experience.

So the second question is:

## **2. How did Nia change the fitness industry?**

It comes from our bare feet. We're doing all of this movement with all of our body, with a very low impact, with our bare feet, because the co-founders of Nia, Debbie Rosas and Carlos Rosas, decided that it was way too injury-prone in this industry with very high impact aerobics.

So if you take off your shoes and you're in your bare feet, and if you really feel the impact, you really start using your body as your guide and paying attention to the impact.

The trade-off on the really positive, positive side is we have so much information when we're barefoot.

In each foot are 26 bones, some 36 joints, over 100 ligaments; there are 19 large muscles, 7,000 nerve endings. So even, with your feet on the floor, you already know that the floor is a little chilly - maybe put your socks on. Maybe with your shoes on you're finding it's really hard to wiggle your toes around. And that's all of what is very novel and unique to Nia.

And in the course of time I've been doing Nia, I haven't had any injuries from it that have stopped me from doing Nia. And being a teacher,

and doing Nia most days, that's really miraculous because I've been doing Nia quite a lot!

And the third question is:

**3. What are the three simple ways to practice Nia and keep the fascination up and the frustration down?**

It comes down very simply to: **Learn, Move** and **Energize**.

**Learning.** So when we're first starting, and if you've not done Nia before, the music will come on, and there'll be some movement, and there'll be some of it that's guided movement, and you're like, "What is that?" And we're working with the foot going forward and your heel leading, and you'll be like, "What is that?" You might be watching, and maybe your heel is a little clunky and it's just your foot doing it and your arm isn't paying attention. That's called "Learning the Moves." Your thinking about what to do and feeling a little mechanical. That's O-K.

**Moving** - as the movements becomes more familiar, the whole body starts engaging, so even as we're walking or doing a Heel Lead or a Cross-Behind, the whole body is engaged. Like, "Oh, yeah! Everything's moving," instead of like, "What is that doing? " And then the whole body grooves, and you start feeling it in the whole body – everything's going.

**Energizing.** And then the third part is where you energize it. If you can translate: think back in time to where you learned to ride a bike, or if you've learned to drive a car. All of a sudden, everything is orchestrated in your body. Your body is organizing and you start going like, "Wow! Oh, I can just kind of move my hand and my arm!" And it's like, "Woo! And maybe it's like, "Woah, it's up there!" So the feet are taking care of themselves and they're energizing it.

And there are actually nine forms that characteristically feed into Nia to give the energy that flavor and make it unique, to give that conditioning to the large and the small muscles.

## **DANCE**

There are three dance forms to give Nia that unique flavor.

**Duncan dance.** Isadora Duncan was *very* free-spirited. She was one of the leaders of modern dance at the turn of the century. She discounted ballet for its strictness and went into her own movement – movement from the solar plexus *up!* Free spirit – somewhat rebellious!

**Modern dance.** Modern dance shaped the stage playing off of gravity. A lot of push-pull, a lot of big muscles. And we're holding balance positions with our whole body instead of everything just being loose. It's like our legs are very active, you know, we're pushing up or pushing down into the ground. Modern dance.

**Jazz.** All about you! Show it off, shimmy! Shoulder isolations.

## **MARTIAL ARTS-**

Tae Kwon Do, martial arts: we have three martial arts. This is where we get a lot of precision. We get a lot of that assertion out, a lot of precision, precise dance. Kicks, always do kicks at your own level. So you don't have to be kicking high. Kicking low can get your muscles going, too.

**Tai Chi.** A slow dance. Shifting. While shifting your weight, so it's almost as if you feel like you're shifting from the left leg to the right – start feeling the energy transfer up and then transfer back down, so you're not out of balance. Your spine is usually erect.

**Aikido.** Very harmonizing and spirally. Harmonizing in space. We're energizing through the group. We often talk about "eyes on the backs of our body." So we get that sensory I.Q. developed.

So these are flavors – now, we're not teaching these art forms specifically, but the flavors come through.

**HEALING ARTS-** We have three healing arts.

**Alexander Technique.** And in the Healing Arts we've got Alexander technique. It was taught by a singer who lost his voice and found through getting his spine realigned and by positioning a feather from the top of his head to the ceiling and aligning his neck - and a lot of body alignment that way.

**Feldenkrais.** Neuromuscular reprogramming, very systemic and organic. Usually very slow. Because you're wondering, "Now how *does* that work, how *do* I get myself down to the ground?" And when I'm on the ground, "How *do* I roll myself over; what is the most efficient way?" And it's all things that naturally we do as children, but we start losing that as soon as we become adults.

**Yoga.** And Yoga is the last of the energetic forms of stretching. It's all about alignment. Bones, Breath and Alignment. Notice there are stretches at the end. All of these movements were there before we had names for them. So it's just coming back into our bodies that way.

Are we ready to dance? Yes, let's do it!