

**Solitude and Affiliation: Internalizing the Balance Using the Art/Technique  
of Isadora Duncan**

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**Abstract: This workshop will illustrate, experientially and didactically, how the Vision of Isadora Duncan has been adapted to the following movement therapy work:**

- 1) Renewing the Spirit; Rediscovering Hope**
- 2) Exploring the dynamic continuum: affiliation/ solitude in “Relationship”**
- 3) Violence Prevention / Resiliency Building**
- 4) Psychological Recovery after exposure to traumatic events**

The choreographic etudes of Isadora Duncan explore, through the action/ rest continuum, the dynamic relationship between affiliation and solitude. Duncan, called the “Mother of Modern Dance”, and most recently, “ American’s First Dance Therapist”, expressed a theory of continuous movement that included sensitivity to the literal and metaphorical flow of energy into and out of the body. In search of movements expressive of the human spirit, her technique: 1) glorifies natural movement, 2) sources rhythmic and emotional links fundamental to all life forms, and 3) traces dance to its sacred roots using mythological archetypes and ritual. “The Dance- it is the rhythm of all that dies in order to live again; it is the eternal rising of the sun.” (Duncan, 1928)

The presenter, a Movement Therapist and a Duncan lineage holder, in working with diverse populations, facilitates movement dialogues that are not impaired by class distinction, ethnicity, or disability. The Duncan prophecy, the presenter’s source of creative inspiration, provides the architecture for containment in her treatment methodology. The tradition:

1) glorifies life forms as inherently harmonious, 2) explores *Transition* (Renewal/Rebirth) with the Maiden Archetype emerging at any age, and 3) recognizes that the balance between *Affiliation* (external environment) and *Solitude* (internal landscape) is necessary for spiritual, emotional, and physical integration.

This workshop illustrates, experientially and didactically, the Duncan vision (the solitude/affiliation continuum) and its application for treatment, self-care, renewal, and resiliency building to:

- 1) Transform confrontational relationship dynamics
- 2) Develop nonverbal communications skills necessary for safety seeking and appraisal
- 3) Reduce the experience of isolation created by Trauma/ Disability
- 4) Reclaim Joy, embracing the rhythms and patterns of nature

As therapists we have all experienced “everyman”: the disabled, disadvantaged, traumatized, emotionally or physically challenged whose existence is imbalanced by some degree of forced isolation. Our society contributes to this sense of isolation, moving us all further and further from nature and its inspiration, teaching us to compete with each other and with the Universe; modeling competition as a winning style and being alone “at the top”, as the coveted place. Somehow we have forgotten that life forms, from the smallest atom to a human being, die when placed too long in isolation (physical, emotional or imagined).

“Establishing connections with others is not merely a matter of participating in a particular pattern of personality. It is a matter of realizing our basic nature. If we adopt a style of aloneness in our relations with others, we contradict a fundamental life process: we defy the biodance, the ebbing and flowing pattern that connects, without which life would cease.” (Dossey, 1982)

If we are able, through our work, to help reduce this sense of isolation, to empower our clients to experience a true sense of connection, we are participating in the healing process. The foundation of the Duncan tradition is affiliation: within oneself, with the social and physical

environment, with the living Universe, through all time, without end.( Duncan always instructed her students to feel communion as they danced; even in solo they were dancing with the winds, the sun, the earth, as partners.) One is never alone. The belief that affiliation is possible is, in itself, healing; to participate in or to observe the beautiful Duncan movement vignettes, transforms our experience of our world and ourselves. The movements and gestures of this tradition inspired by and in response to classical music, evoke emotional states which may promote healing; And is it not “Hope” which is reclaimed by the Human Spirit as the healing process, the movement towards balance, begins? Duncan’s choreographic gestures, which are open, outward and upward, are always expressive of hope and courage.

“Her rhythmic line was always *up*; from her first joyous dances which seemed to float in pure sunshine, to the last tragic compositions which still expressed the indomitable reaching upward of the human spirit. Her message was of Man’s immortality, the divinity within him which lifts his soul toward Heaven when he is happy, and makes his feet leave the earth in the dance; and in the darkness of despair still turns his eyes heavenward seeking the light of *Hope* and understanding.” (Duncan, 1928)

The physical and symbolic circle is one of the building blocks in the architecture of this tradition:

“An aspect of Duncan technique which we see reflected in dance therapy method is the circle and focus on interaction. Much of the technique work in Duncan classes was done in a circle, and there was enormous emphasis on both dyadic and group interaction resulting in sensitive, synchronous movement. Her technique was a journey towards a balance between

freedom and discipline, towards a merging of feeling with form.” (Berger, 1992)

In the physical circle everyone is equal and included; moving in a circular pattern is grounding and calming; experiencing the continuum of life, the movement of breath in and out of the body, the cycles of the moon and the tides, of birth and death and spiritual return, is the metaphysical, symbolic circle. The circle is symbolic of integration; integration of emotion, spirit, cognition, and the physical is what we seek in the healing process.

Duncan spoke of the danger inherent to linear thought and movement; She was a student of the Laws of Nature, wherein all is the circular expression of unending, ever-increasing evolution, wherein are no endings:

“The movement of waves, of wind, of the earth is ever in the same lasting harmony. We realize that the movement of the free animals and birds remains always in correspondence to their nature, the necessities and the wants of that nature, and its correspondence to the earth nature. It is only when you put free animals under false restrictions that they lose the power of moving in harmony with nature, and adopt a movement expressive of the restrictions place upon them. So it has been with civilized man.”

(Duncan, 1928)

Larry Dossey, M.D., in his book, *Space, Time and Medicine*, expresses a similar concern. He traces the evolution of the linear concept of time to the development of accurate measurement devices, faulting clocks as contributing to man’s disconnect with cyclical natural processes:

“Newton held to a cyclical view of time as intrinsic to nature; the linear view of time was popularized by Leibnitz, Barrow, and Locke. Linear

time is divisible into past, present, and future, and once an event has happened, it will never occur again. Our lives are so chronometrically dominated that not only have we become unconscious of the cycles of nature, we have become inured to the cycles within ourselves. We no longer eat when hungry or sleep when sleepy, but follow the dictates of the clock.” (Dossey, 1982)

The perception of time as linear does not include the concept of repetition. In his remarkable book, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade states that primitive man believed that an act became real only insofar as it repeated an archetype. Repetition or participation formed the sole basis for reality. Only by ceasing to become himself could he achieve reality. Inherent in the imitation of archetypes and in the repetition of paradigmatic gestures is that *time was abolished*. As we borrow from the past, taking on an archetypal role or participating in a ritual, we honor our place in the ever-spiraling continuum, we are empowered to experience ourselves as component to a greater reality: We are not alone.

“In learning a Duncan dance, in taking on an archetypal role, and in becoming one with that role, the simultaneous experience of the archetypal myth with the archetypal movement qualities can be an incredibly powerful experiential process: cathartic, insightful, and transforming. We see, in this process, one of the most crucial dance as therapy transformative methods: the experience of new movement patterns and forms as a means to experience new feelings, or to discover unconscious memories, or to learn new behaviors.” (Berger, 1992)

The healthy, responsive, focused and attentive individual models the behaviors of wild animals attuned to, but not overwhelmed by the threats of the natural environment. He is able to maintain a balance between awareness of the external environment and internal calm. Trauma can leave an individual with an inability to function as exaggerated focus on external threats, manifested as anxiety or hypervigilance, disable him. The imbalance may also manifest itself as an exaggerated focus on the internal process, as a child dissociates, in defense against a painful environment. This defense mechanism may overpower to the degree that the child loses her connection to the outside world. The Duncan movement patterns and gestures can empower the child to reconnect with the rhythm of nature encouraging the process of integration and balance. This powerful component of the Duncan work lies in its ability to transform imbalance; transformed, the individual maintains an attentive, peripheral awareness of potential environmental threats, internally calm, focused and able to enjoy daily rituals.

The Duncan tradition inspires Hope, connecting us to the rhythm of Nature, which is unending. It seeks to find a balance, to create a continuum, an unending circle between affiliation and solitude, between the external environment and the internal landscape. In affiliation, we join and experience; in solitude we reflect upon our experience, selecting and internalizing components of that experience, which contribute to the developing personality. This necessary balance between solitude and affiliation can be found in most every Duncan dance; it is a relationship, which greatly contributes to the development of resiliency (internalized solutions, expanded repertoire of emotions, self regulation). The dynamic relationship between affiliation and solitude is explored through the continuum of action and rest. Balance may be achieved in two different ways; the individual may affiliate, (dancing, playing or interacting with others) during the action phase; rest would occur in this dynamic during the solitude phase. On

the other hand, the individual may find solitude during the action phase, moving alone, at his own pace, in his movement pursuit; the affiliation in this dynamic would occur during the rest phase, as in traditional group “sharing”. The process of balancing promotes health, both psychic and physical. In this work we discover the distinction between “isolation”, an unhealthy condition, and “solitude”, a necessary component of the dynamic life continuum.

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