

**REGENERATING OUR ROOTS, FLOWING INTO THE FUTURE: DANCING WAVES AROUND THE AXIS MUNDI**

**Dicki Johnson Macy**

**Boston Children's Foundation, International Trauma Center**

**Abstract: Participants will explore, through embodied experiences of both the archetypal Axis Mundi (spine/tree) and the rhythmic wave movement pattern, self and collective orientation, meaning making, and healing. Personal imagery will be accessed in the service of relationship building, the understanding of “calling” as it relates to depth and beauty, and collective story telling. Tools of embodiment, inspired by the work of Marian Chace, Blanche Evans and Isadora Duncan are provided and are applicable for individual and group work for resiliency building, trauma recovery, and the reclaiming of joy.**

**Description:**

**Since the beginning of civilization, stories embodied and manifested as movement rituals, have given humans a bridge between themselves and the unpredictable world. Providing release from their mundane anxieties, conflicts, and frustrations, these imagistic and symbolic stories also assured guidance and containment in the human pursuit of meaning making and belonging. The cultural evolution of these myths, which accessed the magic within as a collective expression of the mystery of life, became our archetypes (collective unconscious): Providing us with a bridge to our ancestors and, potentially, to our progeny, these archetypes call to us as we dance: We are inside them, serving them.**

According to the theory of the collective unconscious, the mind contains fantasy pictures of an impersonal nature which cannot be reduced to experiences in the individual's past, and can not be explained as something individually acquired. These fantasy pictures have their closest analogies in mythological types. We assume that they correspond to certain collective structural elements of the human psyche, and like the morphological elements of the human body, are inherited. These 'pre-existent forms of apprehension or intuition' Jung called 'archetypes' or 'primordial images' (Jung). Historian Walter Otto proposes how embodied ritual and myth developed based upon observation and emotional response:

“...From time immemorial man has considered it beneficial to assimilate the great occurrences of the earth and the universe. A profound sense taught him to adjust his own actions to their forms and movements: to the course of the sun by turning toward the right; to the three and four fold divisions of heaven's and earth's expanse and to the passage of time by ordering his own existence, and so forth....”. And rituals developed that could only exist thanks to a great emotion, a feeling of passionate exaltation. And such exaltation can have been aroused only by a mythic vision which had taken possession of the human spirit. Whatever type of myth this was-whether it revealed the essential form of an animal, or the drama of an awakening procreative force, the story of the course of the sun, the spirit of combat, etc-it had to enter reality as action. That was the form in which it existed among men, whether it ever was presented

as narrative or not. But when the life of this myth is extinguished and the mechanical action is passed on from generation to generation, phantom ideas begin to inhabit the empty shell.”

Only that which is alive is capable of developing. In a time where digital relationships prevail, our gestural language and embodied rituals have been truncated. Contemporary humankind has forsaken the sensory mode of perception, which celebrates the oneness of all life forms; environmental violence, including war and terrorist attacks, have transformed our perception to the mythic mode: “us against them”. (Le Shan). We have forgotten ancestral rituals for community celebration and healing; in ancient cultures there existed the consciousness transforming practices of dance and song circles. James Hillman, in the following statement, expresses a similar sense of our devolution as a creative and unified species: “A culture as manically and massively materialistic as ours creates materialistic behavior in its people, especially in those people who've been subjected to nothing but the destruction of imagination that this culture calls education, the destruction of autonomy it calls work, and the destruction of activity it calls entertainment.”

We must assume that the tendency toward digital communication will increase with time and this increase will bring us, as a race, further and further away from full bodied engaged communication. It is now more the norm than the exception to see a young mother, baby on her hip, gazing and speaking into her cell phone, rather than interacting with her child. And this digital engagement, with the

child as appendage, is establishing itself as foundation for contemporary ritual dance. Initiates, those new to a practice, will mimic what they observe, with the goal being “belonging”. So, young mothers, babies, children entering school, anyone experiencing a rite of passage into a new way of being or environment, will assume the practice or posture of those that precede them. What I propose here is that we are modeling the superficial rather than the deep. And to paraphrase Otto, the mechanical rather than the deep is being passed on. The meaning behind our stories has been lost; We are becoming a culture that goes blindly through the motions rather than living the ecstatic. We are losing access to the great collective emotion that is expressed when humans are united by awe and love. The great soul beauty that develops from that which ‘calls’ us, will lie dormant. And this calling or inspiration is what creates the beautiful; we imbue the object of our inspiration with beauty and meaning, and pass on this bias as we call others to join us. It is now, more than ever, that we need to return to the true roots of Dance Movement Therapy: embodiment of our individual and collective narratives which are accessed through depth work which sources unconscious imagery. We must be the guardians, assuring that we keep alive and pass on these remembered stories and symbols of our humanity.

Penny Lewis in describing ritual dance, speaks of the process of inward focus and outward expression which could never be fully experienced with a digital intermediary object as part of the communication loop:

**“...dance rituals in which the roots of therapy are most clear are those of the “imageless dances” in which the primary goal is one of attainment of a transcendent ecstasy. The focus is inward toward the eventual release of ego. The outer world is replaced by exhilaration. The circle, a universal symbol of totality is frequently the structural motif. Hypnotized by the repetitive rhythmic movement action and supported by the enclosure of the circle, surrendering to frenzy, they merge with others.”**

**In the following section I will explore archetypal images and movement patterns which have social and biological relevance to meaning making, safety building, expression of emotion, and true relationship building. These images, the sacred pole or axis mundi, and movement patterns, the wave or spiral pattern, are the foundation for universal ritual dances.**

**The sacred pole (tree) and the spine, unite symbolically earth with heaven or the ego with the realm of the archetypes. “This ‘vital link’ is in the fact that what gives to the psyche its stability, gives to the personality what we call ‘backbone’, a fortitude able to support the weight of an authentic life.”(Newmann). Jung described the ‘collective unconscious’ as localized anatomically in the cerebellum and the spinal cord.**

**Kestenberg, in “The Role of Movement Patterns in Development” describes the import of verticality in the child’s presentation of self:**

**“The child shows the manner in which he appraises himself and others through precursors of shaping in the vertical plane. This plane remains the plane of presentation throughout life. As the child becomes proficient in**

getting up and stooping down, his feelings of self evolve from the cognizance of his whole extended body and his budding recognition that he has a center of gravity and can shift it.”

A beginning focus upon this vertical self, the anatomical spine, and the symbolic axis mundi, sacred pole or tree is a focus of orientation or safety. Orientation to the center of the room, as home base from which we move and to which we return following a symbolic journey, when repeated, creates a sense of safety and stability. The establishment of safety is the necessary first step in any therapy or narrative expression. The symbolic center, or ‘heart of the room’, may be adorned with personal images that lend themselves to the fuller embodiment of vertical strength. A tree with roots may be imaged and danced. Imaging the tree as unified rather than isolated is an important focal shift especially in working with a traumatized population, who may experience themselves as isolated. “We see trees as separate entities. If we go one level underground, we would see that all trees are part of one gigantic organism, the forest. We’d see each tree is but an antenna for the organism and that all are connected by their root system...Trees that are in the sun share their good fortune with trees that are in the shade.” (Shlain). Martha Graham gives analogy to the tree body: The spine is your body’s tree of life. And through it a dancer communicates; his body says what words cannot.

The archetype of vertical maiden we find in myth based stories. The embodied experience of the vertical maiden is one of renewal. The dance of vertical maiden sings : I am new, this is the first time I experience this day, this song, this group. As

vertical maiden we may access Aphrodite, the goddess of love, or Artemis, goddess of the wild nature. Artemis also gives us the experience of self internal, accessed in contemplative solitude; This solitude is not sanctioned by our extraverted competitive society. The symbolic return to the chrysalis encourages this access.

All the movements of the earth follow the line of wave motion. As we explore the rooted and oriented individual and access the wave pattern, we embody our strength and our connection to the physical and psychic world around us. Isadora Duncan, whose work, based upon archetypal and natural movement, discovery of the soul, relationships founded in depth and truth, speaks of unity and the wave:

“All the movements of the earth follow the lines of wave motion. Both sound and light travel in waves. The motion of water, winds, trees and plants progresses in waves. The flight of a bird and the movement of all animals follow lines like undulating waves. If then one seeks a point of physical beginning for the movement of the human body, there is a clue in the undulating motion of the wave. It is one of the elemental facts of nature, and out of such elemental the child, the dancer, absorbs something basic to dancing”.

Duncan further states, in regard to movement and emotion: “Emotion works like a motor. It must be warmed up to run well, and the heat does not develop immediately; it is progressive. The true dancer, stands before Beauty in a state of complete suspense; He opens the way to his soul and his “genius” and he lets himself be swayed by them as trees abandon themselves to the winds. He starts with one slow movement and mounts from there gradually, following the rising curve of his

inspiration, up to those gestures that exteriorize his fullness of feeling, spreading even wider the impulse that has swayed him, fixing it in another expression. The movements should follow the rhythm of waves: the rhythm that rises, penetrates, holding in itself the impulse and the after-movement; call and response, bound endlessly in one cadence”.

The shape of the spine, after the spinal curves have developed, looks like a simple standing wave. Nikolai Bernstein discovered that physical movements are encoded in our brains as waveforms. The brain can instantly resonate to and recognize waveforms. Once recognized, the inverse transform allows them to be implemented into behavior. ( Wieder). We access the wave within and around us, in focusing upon the circle of breath as it moves in and out of the body. We dance the over curve and under curve of the wave as we move through space, gaining a sense of connection to the oneness we are component to in the natural biological and geographical world. Isadora further notes: “All true dance movements possible to the human body exist primarily in Nature. What characterizes a wave, the secret of the undulating line, lies in the fact that movement and form are one. There is no wave without movement; yet the wave cannot appear without the medium in and through which it flows.. A wave is both moving and at rest. “It is this quality of repose in movement that gives to movements their eternal element.”

What becomes eternal? And is it possible to sustain access to the eternal in a digitally and externally driven culture? We that continue to embody and share our ancestors’ stories and rituals, we that love the unity we experience in nature based



etudes, we that allow time for the chrysalis, we that know the value of meaning making and belonging, we that gaze into the eyes of our children when we sing, will answer.

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