

# Movement For The Mind:<sup>TM</sup>

## Dance That Awakens Healing, Inspiration And Wisdom

François E. Netter





# **Movement For The Mind<sup>TM</sup>: Dance That Awakens Healing, Inspiration And Wisdom**

By  
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Some names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the individuals mentioned in this book.

# **Dedication**

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This book treats dance as a metaphor for life. It is an invitation to reclaim our creative connection to the body, and to use movement as a purposeful and joyous process for integrating body, mind, emotions, and spirit and solving the problems we once thought of as only mental. For some it will be a call for healing. For others it is an opportunity to express feelings in the body for the first time. For many it might just be the invitation to embrace the forgotten child and artist within. I believe that there is an inner dancer in each of us, and I dedicate this book to that universal and conscious place.



# Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

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*"I think the reason dance has held such an ageless magic for the world is that it has been the symbol of the performance for living."*

— Martha Graham

This original manuscript was written over ten years ago, however as I spent time re-editing and updating various sections, the contents seem more significant and relevant than ever.

I just finished conducting a graduate credit course for educators on Movement For The Mind: Integrating right and left brain learning. Teachers continually share with me their frustration with the learning environment and concern for their students and tell me that there is an imminent need for both balance and integration in the classroom and curriculum. My courses on Movement, Motivation, Yoga and Creativity are extraordinarily popular. Educators are realizing that without inspiration and utilizing a wide variety of creative modalities including creative movement to engage students, learning is just not happening. The compartmentalization and segmentation that I describe and refer to in this book about our modern 21<sup>st</sup> century society are only too apparent in our educational systems. Even in primary schools, PE and the Arts are labeled "Specials" and are only intermittently available each week. There is rampant diagnosis of ADD and ADHD and lack of focus and concentration is a serious impediment to learning. The principles and exercises described in this book address solutions than can be profoundly implemented in educational venues for children and for adults who never got this form of "education."

The information in this book I believe offers a unique antidote to many of the problems facing us today. It integrates body with mind and creates a vehicle for learning, fun, creativity and revelation. It incorporates the principles of "The Secret," "Shadow Work" and utilizes as a vehicle what we all share in common: our bodies and minds. It is akin to Yoga and to what the ancient Yogis instruct us about life: That the treasures that we all are looking for are always there, right in front of us or more precisely, within us.

While I was in graduate school, a living disciple of Isadora Duncan, who was a guest lecturer at the school, was asked, "Do you think Isadora Duncan would have recommended Dance Therapy?" She answered, "Isadora believed that if every child was taught the principles of dance, there would be no need for therapy."

This book will show you how to apply movement as a powerful technique for creativity, problem solving, healing, and personal growth by combining two of our most precious resources — the body and the mind. While there are numerous techniques available that stimulate the body/mind connection, Movement For The Mind is unique in that its foundation is rooted in both art and mental awareness. By incorporating movement principles that are easily learned and then expanded upon with directed mental imagery, you will learn how to actively create what you want and to use each session as a practice field for life. Furthermore, you will tap into an ancient calling for self-expression and joy that is found in the most basic use of this body — dance/movement.

Whether you are an educator seeking to integrate right and left brain learning in your classroom, or a working professional seeking stress management, or someone who is ill and suffering from chronic pain, or someone who is seeking greater peace and clarity in your life emotionally and spiritually, or someone who

just wants to expand your creativity — this book can offer you an expanded vision and experience. For those of you who have already experienced the aesthetic delight of movement, this book will teach you how to combine a sense of purpose and mental clarity with your movements allowing you to design dances that can teach, heal or simply exhilarate.

In an age that is dominated by the intellect and technology, this technique of moving mindfully takes you deeper into your psyche and at the same time allows you to safely re-connect to your body. Connecting to the body while focusing the mind allows you to capture the moment and pause in a space that can align you physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This experience of internal alignment causes profound insights, and can lead to significant physical and behavioral changes.

Because the technique is largely internally directed, the fear of being watched or compared to others is eliminated. This allows you to discover a personal freedom in your body that you may have reserved only for childhood. Each person's experience is unique and yet universal themes such as feeling relaxed, energized, enthusiastic, alive, more aware, and connected are shared by individuals of all ages and from all walks of life.

Movement For The Mind can be practiced individually or in a group session and can also be used to strengthen communication and enhance relationships. Yet even in a group session, each individual has an opportunity to connect to what is personally significant.

For example, in a group session sponsored by a private corporation to enhance creativity in the work place, one executive abandoned his resistance to "dancing" and discovered that the tools for creativity and communication could be explored and enhanced significantly through Movement For The Mind.

Through a process that allowed him to substitute movement for words, he first learned to listen to the flows and rhythms in his own body starting with the breath and then learned how to explore some of his work patterns and his communication skills with others.

In the session he practiced new ways of moving that also reflected the mental images of creativity that he desired. At the end of the session he shared, "I had no idea that I could learn this much about myself and others through this method of movement. Not only did I gain an awareness about my work patterns, but also I was able to experience how it felt to be in a creative state and to literally move from this place. I feel great and I have some very useful information that I can apply at work and in my personal life."

Restoring a sense of wholeness and safety in the body is the result that Janice, a woman in her forties, gained from private Movement For The Mind sessions. Janice spent most of her life trying to hide and appear invisible identifying herself as a nice person that never made waves, rarely took risks, and played it safe in all situations over which she had control.

In the sessions, she discovered that the key to her fears and many of her self-limiting beliefs stemmed from wounds from her past. Engaging the body and mind through Movement For The Mind allowed her to experience feelings and memories that she had buried, safely expressing and releasing them, and to make new choices. To her amazement, she discovered a bubbly, animated, and very expressive personality who loved to move and had no need to disappear or remain anonymous.

For Janice making these changes in her body transformed her world from drab to dazzling colors in every area of her life — affecting her physical appearance, her job, and her relationship

with her husband and children. The outer changes were significant, but for her, the most profound change was in her inner experience. "I am finally at home with my body, with myself." And for Janice that experience was everything.

The rest of this book unfolds the stories of many others who bring to life the principles and applications of Movement For The Mind and how it can be used to enhance your life.

## How To Use This Book

The next chapter describes in detail the principles of Movement For The Mind and how it works. Chapter Two walks you through a sample Movement For The Mind session. The *Warm Up* and *Creative Exploration* sections can be used on their own or to physically warm up the body and refresh your movement vocabulary. Chapters Three through Six discuss four important uses of Movement For The Mind: to reduce our stress levels, to give us greater access to our creativity, and to serve as an effective tool for psychotherapy and physical healing. Each of the chapters concludes with a Movement For The Mind session that you can do in your own home or environment. The final chapter is a compilation of writings by some of the individuals who have experienced this work. They have used their own unique styles to narrate their experiences and to illustrate the dynamic quality that is also available to you.

You can read and do the exercises in order as suggested. Or you may read the whole book from beginning to end and then go back and do the exercises that speak most directly to you. You can also use the CD on Movement For The Mind. Either way, it is the experience of this material that will bring the concepts alive for you.

*Françoise E. Netter*

A great teacher of mine once said, "Don't believe the words I tell you. Experience them within yourself. Then you will know the truth."

Through this book I invite you to discover the joy, creativity, and knowledge that lies within you. To rediscover the most natural language of your body, Dance. Dance, not as a specialized art form for the few, but as a soulful, purposeful language for all. Dance that reunites your body with your mind. Dance that awakens your body as a vehicle for guidance and insight, expression, integration and inspiration.

# **Chapter 1: What Do You Call This? Is It Dance?**

*“Dancing is the loftiest, the most moving, the most beautiful of the arts, because it is no mere translation or abstraction from life; it is life itself.”*

— Havelock Ellis

While living in Northern California, I taught a session of a “Business and Creativity” course that a large and successful private corporation in Southern California offered to top managers to increase their motivation and stimulate their creativity. When they saw the curriculum of the course, several of the executives said, “If I have to dance in this course I am not taking it under any circumstances!” The president of the company assured them that no one would have to “get up and dance in front of everyone.”

I flew to Southern California as scheduled and, since I was going to the airport directly after my session, I brought my overnight luggage to the class. “I heard there was a rumor circulating that you might have to dance,” I said to the twenty-five participants, most of them men. “I just want you to know that I have tutus in my bag and I’ve brought them in several sizes to fit each one of you!”

That broke the ice. Everyone participated fully, and reported that they felt more relaxed and had gained new insights that they could apply both professionally and personally. One male executive in his sixties practically gushed, “Can we do this every day?” Another asked me, “What do you call this work? Is it dance?”

These executives' responses — their initial resistance and their later enthusiasm for the work and what it had helped them accomplish — were neither unusual nor unexpected. As a student in the Creativity in Business course in the MBA program at Stanford University asked, "What purpose does dance or this movement have? How is this going to improve my creativity or chances in business?" Dance is often regarded as irrelevant for successful, intelligent, motivated adults. It also provokes anxiety.

Why? How have we become so far removed from an activity that is as natural to the body as sounding is to the vocal chords? Why have we become so reliant on the logical mind that we have forgotten the wisdom of the body? How have we kept ourselves separate from our individual artistry and separate from the creative connection to our bodies? How can we place so little value on opportunities that help us increase awareness, consciousness, and healing while we experience a sense of integration and wholeness?

Part of the answer lies in our Western culture. Art became separate from everyday life at the onset of Greek civilization. The concept of a stage was introduced and a symbolic chasm between the "audience" and the "performer" was born. A distinction was made between those who were artists and those who weren't. During the same period, great philosophers such as Socrates and Plato gave the intellect a prominence that still influences us today. Mind and body were made separate, with the mind in the more elevated and significant position. The body was considered secondary.

Religion saw the same segregation. Dancing used to be an important part of all religious rituals. In the Gnostic gospel, *Acts of John*, Jesus was quoted as saying, "To the Universe belongs the dancer." Early Christian congregations performed liturgical dancing until about the seventh century, when dancing was

outlawed for being too sensual. The body was allegorically separated from the mind. Dance was taken out of its spiritual context and labeled as secular, base and impure, along with the body.<sup>1</sup>

Although Eastern mystics associated dancing with Gods and Goddesses such as Shiva and Kali, whose dances expressed the rhythms of life itself, Eastern religious and philosophical traditions also tended to separate body from mind. Even Hatha Yoga (the traditional practice of postures that has become so popular in the West) is practiced largely to purify the body so that the mind can reach ecstatic, altered states of consciousness. Pranayama (powerful breathing techniques) was practiced to achieve out-of-body experiences. The body was viewed as just a shell that could be discarded as easily as a piece of clothing. Being in the body or revering the earth was not viewed as significant. Conquering and rising above both was.

Technology has only aggravated our emphasis on the intellect and left-brain. In the twenty-first century, technology has brought us convenience and abundant information. But most of this information needs to be analyzed mentally, and is absorbed as we sit in front of a screen, watch a video, or listen to a lecture. Western culture has honed our intellect and modern technology has created many personal and professional conveniences, but both have also inadvertently contributed to a more fragmented and passive approach to living.

<sup>1</sup> Walker, Barbara R. *The Women's Dictionary Of Symbols & Sacred Objects*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988.

We have become accustomed to having almost everything we need at our fingertips and to accessing knowledge instantly. We are used to swallowing a pill for what ails us physically or emotionally. Yet, there is no magic pill or instant solution to give us creative fulfillment, satisfying intimate relationships, or physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. These deeper needs require intention, active participation, directed change, conscious integration, and continuous growth and practical application.

As a culture, we have become adept at linear and cognitive thinking, but we have relinquished much of the value placed on imagination, creativity, and active play. However, the challenges that face most of us daily are not just mental, nor are they just material.

In her visits to the West, Mother Teresa often commented on the tragic contrast between the material wealth of our population and the emotional and spiritual impoverishment that afflict so many of us.

We have learned to compartmentalize the different aspects of our lives. Separating mind from body, intellect from emotions, and body from spirit, we fragment most of our activities and approach them exclusively rather than inclusively. We exercise our intellects by going to school, we attend to our bodies by working out, we go into therapy to heal our emotions, and we take care of our spiritual needs by attending church or temples of worship. There is no visible integrative link or continuity. In our sophistication, we seem to have lost some of our basic knowledge about how to live.

Feeling the “dis-ease” in our society, many of us today are beginning to pay attention to the practices and philosophies of Native American Indians, Australian Aborigines, and other

ancient tribal peoples who understood the delicate balance of life. These cultures used art to express this balance and to honor the interrelatedness between the human body (the individual) and the earth's body (the universal). In valuing their relationship to the earth, they also paid homage to their own creativity. Their bodies and their crafts were an integral part of their heritage and identity.

In most primitive societies including today's Australian Aborigines, dance as art is not separate from life. The basic life activities — arising, eating, working, courtship and marriage, birthing and dying, healing, making war and peace, enforcing laws — all are ritualized and expressed through dance. Dance is not a separate activity that a few do in their spare time or even an activity that distinguishes the audience from the participant. Dance is a paradigm for life, and through dance the cycles of life are experienced. The body is the instrument for spiritual worship, emotional expression, physical demonstration, and nonverbal communication. In dance, art and life are positively wed, and serve to nurture and sustain the individual and society.

Dance as a creative art activity integrates body, mind, emotions, and spirit. No wonder the Australian Aborigines, American Indians, and countless other cultures incorporated dance as a daily ritual to mirror life's major occurrences. Dance was not just physical exercise, like aerobics, or an elevated art form that few could perform, like ballet, or pure entertainment, like jazz, break or ballroom dancing; it was daily medicine for the body and soul that all people could learn and partake in.

We need to move toward an integrative approach to living: one in which we embrace the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual components of ourselves and our communities. We need philosophies, activities, and practices that unify these components, not as scattered pieces of a puzzle, but as inseparable colors in a rainbow or octaves on a musical scale.

## Movement For The Mind™

The technique that I have developed over the past thirty plus years — Movement For The Mind™ — is such a practice. This technique, which evolved out of the principles of modern dance choreography, dance therapy, and self-awareness techniques such as yoga and guided visualization, has five main stages.

During a session, participants first lie on the floor with their eyes closed and take an “inventory,” which is a technique for clearing the mind and becoming more self-aware and conscious of the breath and the physical body. Next, with eyes still closed, participants warm up each part of the body. Then they explore different ways of moving through space. Participants generally move as individuals, but in some sessions they also work and interrelate in groups of two or three. In the fourth stage, participants explore a theme through dance, thus creatively focusing all parts of themselves — body, mind, psyche, and spirit — on one goal. It is this part of the session that is unique to Movement For The Mind. Finally, participants express what they have experienced through another medium such as journaling, drawing or painting, or in a facilitated debriefing session. This final stage integrates intellectual understanding with the physical experience.

People who have participated in Movement For The Mind™ have reported a wide variety of benefits. Although much of the book will detail these benefits, I’d like to touch upon a few of them now:

- The rewards that come with physical exercise are generated, such as the release of endorphins and the increase of the body’s ability to utilize oxygen. A sense of wellness, relaxation, and exuberance accompanies the session.

- Creativity is enhanced. The mind relaxes while the body leads energetically. This can activate insights and realizations that surface freely, bypassing our habitual mental censorship. It can also lead to inspiration in other subjects, art forms and to problem solving.
- Emotions and feelings, including those long forgotten or repressed, can be easily expressed and released.
- Stress is relieved through breathing exercises and other techniques that increase one's control over internal reactions and thus ease the effects of stress.
- Both physical and emotional healing becomes a process of empowerment. Joy and a sense of connection in the body replace the traumas of physical and emotional pain.
- People experience significant psychological breakthroughs and make corresponding positive changes in their daily lives.

These benefits occur through a twofold process. The first part embraces the power of dance itself. The second part addresses the capacity to integrate the power of the mind with the body's intelligence, and speaks to the inherent connection between mind and body.

The rest of this chapter provides the background for understanding why Movement For The Mind is such a powerful path to creative wholeness. First, I discuss the "physical roots" of Movement For The Mind, which include the symbolic nature of dance, and the disciplines of modern dance, and dance therapy. Then I survey what we have learned about the mind/body connection to shed light on why Movement For The Mind can help us lead more fulfilling and satisfying lives.

## The Power Of Dance

Physically, dance is the creative translation of what we do in this body: move. Dance speaks to every aspect of our being. It challenges us physically and at the same time satisfies the human need for self-expression, communication, and meaning. It demands that the mind be clear, focused, and attentive. Each movement must be birthed from emotional integrity, so that when people dance, they may experience the oneness that mystics speak of reaching in the highest spiritual state. Yogis refer to the creation of the universe as the Dance of Shiva. French author, Anais Nin, coined the phrase “life is a dance,” and countless poets and philosophers have made similar analogies between dancing and living.

However, in Western culture dance has been less accessible to the general public than perhaps any other art form. When I was a child, everyone was encouraged to draw and learn to play a musical instrument whether they showed specific artistic talent or not. Although I was offered ballet classes as a child, my brother never took dance lessons. After I stopped taking ballet, I don’t remember taking any other class in school that encouraged creative self-expression through the medium of the body.

The purpose of all art is to communicate. Dance communicates through the language of movement. The dancer needs only the body as a vehicle for creative expression. All content comes from the inside and is brought into form through the body. Dancing, singing, and acting are the only art forms that can stand alone without any other embellishments or supportive props. But even the singer and actor need words. Silently, the dancer uses what connects us all to this earth, the body.

In ancient and primitive cultures, symbols and rituals were significant components of everyday life. These cultures, which

revered and lived closely with the earth and nature's cycles, utilized movement intentionally as a metaphor for living. They did not rely solely on words to communicate, but understood the power of the symbolic and the power of living in the body. Dance, through its use of gestures, incorporates the symbolic in the acting out of movement. It also allows man to embrace the sacred within his own body.

In the early twentieth century the pioneers of modern dance — including Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Ruth St. Denis, and Doris Humphreys — used dance to express once again the passions, pains, and spiritual elements of life. Their dances told stories that contained the emotional and soulful aspects of human experience.

Isadora Duncan understood the power of dance not only to express, but to impact life. She saw dance as the blending of mental and physical discipline, physical agility, emotional content, and soulful expression. Her dance technique, which combined structure with freedom of movement, helped her captivate audiences around the world with her simple but universal gestures. She parlayed in the company of intellectuals, political leaders, and fellow artists. The Russian Revolution colored the times, but Isadora was bent on her own revolution: dance education for all children. She felt that dance could provide a foundation for both the creative and practical lessons of life. Although Isadora's work was cut short by her tragic death, she left a legacy that paved the way for modern dance giant Martha Graham, her contemporaries, and those who followed.

Today the evocative power of movement can still be experienced. For example, at a performance by the Limon Dance Company, the audience was electrified by the dance "Carlota," which is performed without music. The emotions conveyed through silent movement were so forceful that I found myself

sitting at the edge of my seat as I absorbed a story of politics and war, love and loss. A second piece, "Heartbeats," wove the cultures and philosophies of more than ten countries. Through music and dance, the choreography brought together these countries' unique flavors and passions. The last section of the dance, "Prayer," made me feel as if I were sitting in an ancient temple. The stage enveloped a sacredness that filled the entire auditorium.

Modern dance pioneers' vision of dance as a universal expression of life is not limited to the relationship between audience and dancer. Without an audience, the process of expressive communication can be an internal experience. The roles of choreographer, audience, and dancer merge into one person. It is this understanding that inspired and led to the work of dance therapists.

Dance therapy, which is primarily a nonverbal, non-tactile process of self-discovery, utilizes the body's movement patterns to communicate, express, and identify whatever that individual is seeking to know. It enables people to let go of the intellect and to allow the creative process to become dominant. Instead of using words, individuals express thoughts, feelings, and experiences through movement. It is distinguished from dance in that dance therapy has no concern with technical skill or outer performance. As in traditional psychotherapy, in dance therapy the dance therapist guides the therapy process for the sole purpose of the participant's self-revelation and healing.

Dance therapy officially began with Marian Chace's work with hospitalized patients and servicemen in the 1940's. At that time there was no term for the experience of post-traumatic stress or for dance therapy. Chace began volunteering at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. when a hospital administrator invited her to work with a group of patients who were nonverbal

and didn't seem to respond to conventional treatment. He thought dance might at least offer them an opportunity for socialization. Chace's work was extremely effective. She was able to establish contact and communication with patients and to facilitate their healing and recovery. She continued her work for twenty-five more years and was instrumental in training and teaching others about dance therapy. In 1966 she helped found the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA).

Dance therapists were trained to read a person's body language and to understand movement flow patterns as expressions of specific psychological states. A lot of focus was given to the group process as a source of socialization and using the group format for positive mirroring and interaction. The interaction between dance therapist and patient was also dynamic and included active participation by the therapist.

By the mid-1970s, there were about 500 dance therapists. However, much of the research and fieldwork in dance therapy was limited to a few populations. While Janet Adler did extraordinary work with autistic children; others did clinical work with the mentally retarded and deaf; and hospitals conducted dance therapy with chronic and acute schizophrenics, dance therapy was generally not seen as a full-spectrum therapy. It was viewed as a specialized form that could be effective with disabled populations that did not respond to conventional forms of treatment.

In my experience, dance therapy is not merely an adjunct therapy or form of intervention that should be utilized on a limited basis or as a last resort with problem populations. Dance therapy is a viable and useful technique for most people who are seeking healing, resolution, or simple clarity.

The Movement For The Mind technique I present in this book integrates the symbolic value of dance with the healing legacy of dance therapy, and includes modern dance's vision of authentic expression. It brings back the power of dance to the individual and provides a vehicle for creative self-expression, integration, healing, and for better understanding ourselves and connecting to others.

## **Connecting The Body And Mind**

To understand how Movement For The Mind helps many people make significant changes in their lives, we need to take a closer look at the connection between body and mind. While living in Northern California, I was contacted by the administrator of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinic at the VA Hospital in Menlo Park, California, to work with women who had been sexually assaulted while serving in the military. The women were in various stages of experiencing trauma including some who were also recalling past memories of child sexual abuse. After conducting a couple of group movement sessions, the administrative and psychiatric staff decided that individual work would be better suited for the population. In a session, one woman was able to recall memories, express and resolve feelings that she had previously negated, and to positively clarify her goals in treatment. After the session the chief psychiatrist said to me, "In a one-hour Movement For The Mind session you've accomplished what would have taken us two years to cover in psychiatry!"

Why was Movement For The Mind so effective? Because body and mind are inextricably linked. The body is affected by the mind, and the body can impact the mind's state.

This insight — that mind and body are one energetic system — is at the heart of the growing field of mind/body medicine and New Age thought. While quantum physicists have confirmed that everything in the universe is composed of energy, in the West the connection between mind and body may still seem like a new and trendy idea; yet it is a principle that Eastern forms of philosophy and medicine have incorporated for thousands of years. Inherent in these studies and healing techniques is the understanding that stagnant or blocked energy can lead to physical and psychic breakdown, causing distress and disease.

For example, Chinese medicine holds that energy flows through the body through channels called “meridians.” In acupuncture, needles are placed at specific points on these meridians to release energy blockages. The energy can then move freely, allowing the surrounding cells and tissues to heal and regenerate.

Eastern forms of movement, including T’ai Chi, Chi Gong, and Yoga, are based on the importance of physical movement for also maintaining the free flow of energy in the body and mind.

In ancient Hindu texts, the energy system of the body is described through the Chakras or wheel-like vortexes of energy. These energy centers, located in the spinal chord, are storage centers for knowledge and life experiences. The body, while viewed as temporal, is what holds and carries this information. Whether it is a childhood trauma or a joyous experience, the body stores the memory even when the conscious mind forgets or attempts to block it out.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, researchers shed light on the physical details of how the mind/body connection works. Others have described the same connection from the point

of view of people's experiences. I will mention a few of these now and discuss them in greater detail in later chapters.

Scientists in the field of Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), who have been studying the link between emotions and the body, are finding that the biochemistry of the brain influences every cell in the body, and that these chemicals (neuropeptides) are not only located in the brain or in what we think of as the mind. They have discovered that there are memory cells found throughout the body that create our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual realities.

Energy medicine practitioners also recognize the influence of thoughts and emotions on the physical body. They view the human body as surrounded by an energy field that is impacted by everything we think, feel, and do. Carolyn Myss, medical intuitive and author of *Anatomy Of The Spirit*, has been instrumental in spreading the awareness of energy medicine. She teaches that our biography becomes our biology: our thoughts, actions, and experiences affect our future health. She stresses that imbalances in any aspect of the self — body, mind, emotions, and especially spirit — must be addressed to maintain well-being. She, like many practitioners in this field, believes that holding onto outmoded emotional and behavioral patterns will eventually cause us problems.

Much of this research has centered on acknowledging the power of the mind and its role in healing and maintaining wellness. There are many techniques that stimulate shifts in attitude and awareness; these include psychotherapy, meditation, creative visualization, hypnosis, affirmations, and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). Some of these techniques illuminate the areas where we feel stuck; some concentrate on the desired result. All of them are primarily mental. The body is merely a silent partner in the process.

At the same time, we have seen the development of many techniques for healing and growth that recognize the importance of also engaging the body. Massage therapy, Feldenkrais, Rolfing, Alexander Technique and Heller work, to name a few of the many valid body therapies, evolved out of the recognition of the connection between mind and body. As the body's muscular/skeletal system is manipulated by the practitioner, the client experiences physical shifts that may also impact other areas of his/her life. For example, while being massaged a client may experience an emotional release. In a Feldenkrais session, an individual may find a new way of moving that both releases physical pain and creates a renewed mental state. Yet, while these techniques are very valuable, they must be performed or directed by the practitioner, and primarily focus on the client's physical experience.

Movement For The Mind unites the strengths of these mental techniques, physical disciplines, and bodywork. It resources the body's intelligence and the mind's capacity for creativity and awareness. Because Movement For The Mind stems from dance, its wellspring is art. Dance's ability to evoke, express, and create — which modern dance pioneers understood and dance therapists harnessed — can be achieved by every person who engages in the art of movement with conscious intent.

Intent, or theme, is a key ingredient of Movement For The Mind. In a Movement For The Mind session, as in our lives, it is our intention (or thematic structure) that helps us achieve our goals and provides our sense of meaning. In a dance meant for the stage, the choreographer creates the theme, and the dancer expresses it through movement. In Movement For The Mind, the individual takes on the role of both choreographer and dancer. The theme unfolds through the variation of movement patterns, and we express our intention through these physical actions. In

our lives it is also our actions that bring forth our visions into reality. Movement For The Mind helps us experience the movement of our bodies as a microcosm of the larger dance of our lives.

When we explore a theme through movement — whether it is the expression of joy or pain, solving a problem, recalling memories of childhood, understanding the meaning of an illness, feeling more grounded and connected in the body, or simply exploring new ways of moving and feeling — the body experiences a shift that can be felt, repeated, and called upon in a tangible way.

This shift, while it begins in the body, is not necessarily about physical changes; though it can be. The process that unfolds for every person is that they connect with something basic within themselves. One individual may change her movement style by walking or holding her posture differently. Another person may lose weight. A third may change his behavioral patterns and how he interacts with others. It is not so much about being able to move in a new way as it is about moving in order to stimulate new states of awareness, which then catalyze the appropriate changes for each individual.

Conscious intent coupled with movement can be applied to virtually any goal. Researchers have discovered that the more senses we can engage in an activity, the more actual and present we can make a desired goal; the easier it can manifest. It does not seem to matter whether the desired result is the healing of cancer, chronic pain, an emotional trauma, or whether it is the desire to change jobs or find a more suitable vocation. Part of the reason Movement For The Mind is so effective is that it employs all of the body's senses to bring about the desired result.

In a Movement For The Mind session, a participant experiences the power of the body / mind connection both passively (unconsciously) and actively (consciously). In the first part of the session dance, breath, mental imagery, music, and the exploration of emotions call upon and integrate body, mind, psyche, and spirit. In the next step, the use of a theme is like a laser beam that directs the energy toward the desired outcome, and drives this unconscious integration to a conscious place.

For example, someone with cancer may get in touch with feelings of tightness, and realize that she has been living with this knot for as long as she can remember. For another, images of never being able to express his needs as a child may surface. In Movement For The Mind sessions, people learn how to express these feelings and to release the tightness resulting from emotional constriction. They begin to let go of old mental and emotional states and to move differently in their bodies. (The difference may or may not be perceptible to anyone else.) They then replace old constructs with new thoughts and behaviors.

Movement that is engaged consciously can anchor the new belief. When we apply the principles of body / mind connection, energy medicine, and the science of psychoneuroimmunology, we begin to grasp the synergy and life force in the body. The more aware we become in the body, the more control we can have over our health, mental state, and happiness.

So while we may intellectually know that our bodies and minds are connected, Movement For The Mind can help us use this connection. In the past thirty years, I have watched with awe as private clients and participants in workshops and group sessions have harnessed the power of dance — to achieve greater knowledge of themselves, to experience catharsis through the expression and release of memories and emotions, to give them clarity and calm in the midst of chaos, and to achieve a sense of

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joy and oneness with their bodies, emotions, and spirits. I invite you to join them.

# **Chapter 2: The Practice of Moving Mindfully**

*"I see the dance being used as a means of communication between soul and soul — to express what is too deep, too fine for words."*

— Ruth St. Denis

In this chapter we will look at the principles and dynamics that make up a Movement For The Mind session. In the first part of the session, you will learn self-awareness tools to open the breath and calm the mind. Then you will warm up the physical body and explore movement vocabulary as a way to engage your body creatively. The second part of this session integrates a theme with the movement technique that you have just learned.

The technique can be experienced in a group or alone. The first part of the session always focuses on you, the individual. In the thematic portion, interrelating with others can encourage communication, relationship, and team building skills. In the following pages, I describe the creative process from the perspective of participating in a group. However, you can do the exercise at the end of the chapter alone or with others. Let's begin the journey.

## **The Practice**

The movement vocabulary that I have developed is based on five dance choreographic principles: time, space, energy, rhythm, and motion. Music is an important component as it lends emotional and environmental content. For example, using music

that is melodious and harmonious can create a calming mood and a peaceful environment, whereas dissonant tones may arouse agitation and the opposite ambiance. In most dance or movement classes, the students follow the teacher's direction, copying the moves and learning specific steps and choreographed movements. Movement For The Mind sessions are verbally guided and are not based on technical skill. There are no precise movements to copy or follow.

There is no audience, so each participant becomes both the audience and the performer. Instead of telling a story to an audience, an inner drama is expressed. It is a dance for the inner self. This is dance in its purest form, for it embraces what is essential in us. It is not for show, but for sustenance. It is not for outer applause or approval, but for self-exploration and for expressing the calls of life. Foremost, it is a tool for knowledge. There is no right or wrong way to move and the pace is always self-regulated.

## **Self-Awareness**

The initial process is inner-directed, and heightens participants' awareness of feeling safe and grounded in the body. Taking off their shoes, participants leave their "voice of judgment" with their shoes. This is the internal critic that tells us that "we're not good enough; we can't do this" and often sabotages and prevents us from fully exploring our creativity.

## **Breathing**

Lying on the floor comfortably with the eyes closed, participants first focus on their breathing. Learning how to

breathe properly by slowing the breath down and filling the diaphragm and lungs more fully is an essential ingredient to staying connected in the body. There are many books about the science of breath. The ancient Yogis, as well as masters in other cultures, understood the power of the breath. The *complete breath* technique I teach, activates awareness of the breath in the torso and also emphasizes the exhalation.

Breathing through the nostrils, participants begin by inhaling from the lower belly, slowly bringing the breath into the outer edges of the diaphragm, filling the ribs fully, and then finally raising the breath into the chest. Once we have inhaled maximally without struggling, the exhalation begins slowly and deeply out through the nostrils until the breath is fully released. In this *complete breath*, it is not necessary to hold the breath between inhalations and exhalations. The emphasis is on fullness, gently activating as much of the torso as possible in each section of the breath, and on the complete release of the exhalation. In our modern Western culture, metaphorically speaking, we ingest far more than we tend to let go. For many, the awareness of releasing is as important as filling up.

## Boundaries

Still with the eyes closed, participants then explore a technique for identifying appropriate boundaries in the body. Creating appropriate boundaries is something few of us were taught as children. Some of us have built unconscious energetic walls as boundaries to protect ourselves, while others are more invasive and need constant contact and acknowledgment. Connecting in the body and realizing and maintaining appropriate boundaries is key to a healthy relationship with ourselves and with others.

The skin is used to identify our physical boundaries. By focusing on feeling the skin's texture along the surface of the body, participants differentiate their physical body from the floor, air, music, my voice, and everything else around them. As children, many of us learned to split or disassociate from the body when we felt scared or threatened. Becoming aware of the skin serves to define our physical boundaries and to reaffirm a sensation of grounding and being fully present in the body.

Once participants define their physical boundaries, they can establish inner boundaries. Individuals sense any restrictions in the body and mentally expand the space inside the skin until there is a feeling of safety, freedom, comfort, and sanctity. Our inner boundaries define what is inwardly personal and can comfortably house our feelings, memories, and visions. Consciously establishing outer and inner boundaries allows us to appropriately stand our ground while being open and compassionate with others without having to be defensive.

## **Inventory**

Subsequently, participants take a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual inventory. Most of us are so busy just keeping up with our fast-paced lives that we tend to operate on automatic pilot. We rarely take the time to observe what we are thinking or feeling. It is precisely this state of being out of touch with what is occurring within us that leads to panic when we get sick or when we are faced with emotional states that we don't know how to handle. By taking the time to replace unconscious thoughts and actions with awareness, we can make better choices and even interrupt negative thought patterns before they lead to undesirable actions.

## Movement Vocabulary

### The Warm Up

The next step is to begin moving the different parts of the body. We use the body as an instrument, and warming it up is as essential as doing scales on the piano. This stage is designed to encourage exploration, develop a movement vocabulary, and promote a sense of safety and comfort in the body. For many of us it is like learning a new language.

Yet, movement is the most natural thing we do. Babies move their tiny limbs effortlessly. They stretch and wiggle, and when they begin to crawl and eventually walk, we applaud every new movement. But most of us, as we enter adulthood, censor what once came naturally and spontaneously. We limit our movements to what is conventional. We walk, exercise, engage in sports, but how many of us walk backwards, sideways, or turning? When do we just explore walking, running, crawling, jumping, sliding, or skipping for the sheer joy of moving? How many of us, left to our own devices, would break out carving shapes in space the way many people start humming or speaking aloud?

As participants move each part of the body, they begin to really feel their bodies perhaps for the first time. They move torso, joints, limbs, and muscles, first in isolation and then in harmony, until they are synchronized like instruments in an orchestra. The rhythm of the breath accompanies the continuous flow of moving limbs, and then participants experiment with movements that pause, stop and begin again, called interrupted flow. We then add changing levels from lying on the floor (low level) to sitting and kneeling (middle level), and finally standing (high level). As we come to standing level, the feet, legs, and lower torso become the focal point. The feet are planted firmly against the floor like giant

roots, while participants explore the sturdiness of the legs and the power center at the navel.

We call the bottom of the feet, “soles.” (“Souls” of the feet.) When we move, the feet are what connect us to the earth. Yet, few of the individuals in the yoga, fitness, and movement sessions I’ve taught had been taught to pay attention to their feet. In Yogic tradition, the awakened energy and power of the great masters or Gurus emanates most strongly from their feet. It is the ultimate blessing to touch or come into contact with the Guru’s feet.

In T’ai Chi and other Eastern forms of exercise, all movement is generated from the chi or power center around the navel. Moving from this center establishes a focal point and is essential to all other movements.

Working in private Movement For The Mind sessions with individuals who felt powerless in different areas of their lives, I have found that grounding and establishing this contact with the feet and with the power center around the navel has a strong influence. After several sessions of reclaiming the energetic connection to their feet, legs, hips, and pelvis, they begin not only to move differently in their bodies, but also to experience taking action in their lives with more confidence, clarity, purpose, and assurance. This shift in the body allows them to feel more grounded and connected in their world.

When the experience of being grounded has been established, participants shift their weight forward, backward, and side to side to challenge their balance. With their eyes closed, students stand on one leg, balance on one hand and knee, lean to the right, lean to the left, and begin to take tiny steps out into the room. They judge their boundaries with a kinesthetic sense, feeling the energy around them rather than using their sense of sight.