

Flow, Movement, Position and Transition

Introduction

Flow, movement, position and transition are aspects of life on earth. In the context of aquatic bodywork, how we flow, move, take positions, and make transitions reflects our grasp of the life skills for which these actions are metaphors. Just as the iris, the palm, the pulse, the face, the ear, and the sole of the foot speak the identity of the body eloquently and truthfully, just as our handwriting, voice and posture reveal our psychological reality, so is our movement an accurate portrait of the inner person.

Flow

Flow is that natural state in which one event follows another seamlessly. Flow is the gracefulness of life. It is the continuity of experience, the perfect synchronicity and coordination, that divine quality of rightness in the unfolding. In the natural world flow is the unbroken continuum by which day blends into night and physical bodies grow imperceptibly. It is river and wind; it is bone, tendon and muscle interpenetrating each other; it is blood and lymph circulating in unending cycles; it is one breath following another.

Flow is present in thinking, feeling, being and doing. It is the foundation of dance in which each movement arises out of the previous one. Flow is in the stroke of the painter's brush, in the melody of a song, and in the spontaneity of speech and writing in which one thought leads effortlessly to the next.

Flow is a quality innate to movement. Movement is symbolic of change, but flow is the principle of *collective progress*, of a universal interconnectedness. In aquatic bodywork, flow encompasses movement, position and transition. Even when the movement flow would seem to stop in moments of stillness, a subtler inner flow of realization takes over; the flow goes to finer levels. A receiver becomes pregnant with input and must do some integration, some "filing" and sorting out.

Like palm fronds moving to an invisible wind, the body in water shifts and sways to the currents generated by the giver. When the body participates in a movement flow, it releases. In the water, out of the full effect of the gravitational field in which contraction is a given, the body relaxes and assumes positions of innocence, open and undefended. It takes on a beautiful appearance not seen on land. It becomes more like water: simple, responsive, surrendered and humble.

When the body is in a movement flow, its feeling flow is enhanced. Blockages and resistance tend to dissolve. Feelings begin to flow into and out of each other. One feeling energy overlies another and awakens another as awareness leads to awareness, as sequences of feeling unlock and express. Flowingness within the giver's being facilitates the receiver entering a flowing state of consciousness. The giver's capacity to be present with herself, to feel, and to accept the feelings of the other creates a healing space of freedom for the receiver.

Movement

Movement is *all pervasive*. This universe expands and contracts in a vast in and out breathing. Its galaxies swirl about their axes. The planets revolve around the sun. Mother Earth rotates about her axis as her oceans and atmosphere flow in unending currents. The earth body is in constant flux as the tectonic plates slide and shift above deeper molten currents. This dance of the macrocosm is mirrored in the microcosm in the inconceivably rapid motion of molecules, atoms and subatomic particles. All the seemingly inanimate structures of nature *move*.

Every sentient creature experiences movement, even those of the plant kingdom rooted in the

ground. We human beings with our nerves, muscles, bones and joints are most certainly designed to move. Movement is so fundamental to our existence that we take it for granted until an injury or illness immobilizes us. It is the major underlying assumption in our daily lives.

Movement is more to us than survival, however; it is our pleasure, exhilaration and joy as we play and engage in sports. Even the passive experience of movement is thrilling as we sail, hang glide, ride in roller coasters and sports cars. We enjoy the speed and power, feel the wind rush by, the past sloughs off, and are alive in the moment. This renewal and refreshment is even more pronounced in dancing, with its added dimension of self-expression. The creativity, release of bound energies, and spontaneity of dance qualify it as *healing*.

Yet, movement has an even more profound function than pleasure or healing: it is essential to the normal neurological development of both humans and animals. From infancy on we progress through developmental stages of movement which parallel the evolutionary ascent of the species. These begin with the "fish" undulation of the spine and culminate in a mammalian cross-crawl, whereby we continue to integrate the right and left brain halves on into adult life in such activities as walking, running and swimming.

Movement gives us a presence we can surrender to, as when an infant lets sleep come over it as its crib is rocked. Just as we nestle into the security of the ongoing rhythm of our breath, of night and day, and of the seasons, so creating a rhythmic and cyclic movement environment in aquatic bodywork offers a secure nest, something we can trust, something we can enter into.

A cycle is movement within a repeating pattern of relative stability. The major elements of human existence, such as work, relationship and health, follow cycles. Likewise, the rounded, water-like movements of Healing Dance are cyclic. These are waves, spirals, circles and figure eight's. These movements are sacred, *experiential spatial mandalas*. Executed with awareness, as a sacrament, they can be a teaching in themselves. Thus, they are also self-extinguishing. As a cycle repeats, the receiver takes it in, uses it in some way, and becomes ripe to move on to new experience. The giver senses this and allows the next thing to happen. As we move in tune with our partner, we might ask ourselves, "What is partner to experience now? What is to come?"

Position

Position is a place to linger, a pause on a journey. Position is a snapshot in time, a temporary resting place. A physical position may appear to our limited senses to be still, but our expanded awareness registers the movement of the cosmos in which we are all passengers. The earth, solar system and galaxy each spiral through the universe: our position in space is ever changing. The body's internal processes are likewise never still, even when asleep, nor does the psyche ever pause from its constant activity in other dimensions. Stillness is illusion; *Reality is movement*.

In aquatic bodywork, as in the "big picture", positions move. We could think of positions as staging points for movements, giving us different leverages to move the receiver. Unique to our work in the water are movements which integrate stability and change, whereby part of the body is securely anchored in nurturing contact with the giver while the rest waves and stretches. The contact with the receiver via the hands, arms, chest, neck, head and legs defines each position and contributes to its particular emotional flavor. The positions of the Healing Dance range from minimal touch and intrusion of the practitioner's presence to full body embraces that envelop the receiver in touch.

All positions may be considered as *sanctuaries*, glowing with heart, devotion, a refuge from the turbulence of the world, a safe harbor imbued with the protective maternal qualities. The positions in which we feel comfortable as giver or receiver provide a measure of our capacity to

give and receive loving nurture. The practitioner who only briefly embraces and holds his receivers or the receiver who cannot enjoy the comforting closeness may each be able to learn something from their preferences and dislikes.

Transition

Life transitions are one of the trickiest areas of experience to flow through. They entail realization of the necessity to change, trust in the unknown, release of the old, reaching toward the new, and finally establishing a new balance and stability. There is uncertainty and risk inherent in transitions, but they are necessary in order to advance. Transitions have so much to teach us. A successfully accomplished transition is so exhilarating, a victory! In the symbolism of the I-Ching, we cross the Great Water and are forever changed. In aquatic bodywork as in life, transitions are probably the most difficult part of technique and at the same time the key to mastery. In the water, transitions relinquish one position for the next. The hands must let go. The hands and holding are symbolic of manipulation and control. As in climbing a ladder, we must release each rung to attain the next, we must lift our foot away and find the next rung. Fear of change distorts movement, either inhibiting it or rushing it. Rather than a leisurely walk in the park, the transition becomes a hastening through a dark alley, hand on the mace. One student freezes, fumbles or goes blank, the other tosses the head or dunks it. Early life transitions seem to have an effect on students' "transition styles". The divorcing of parents, the death of close ones, moving to another country or school, all happening when we hadn't the resources to cope can leave their impact. How regretfully easy it is for a child to experience change as loss.

An examination of beliefs about life transitions can be useful to the student experiencing difficulties with them in the water. Graceful transitions come with the belief that they *belong* to the flow and are not cruel accidents to be avoided. On the level of technique, we must learn them as separate moves outside the repeating movement cycles, but in our minds we need to *re-integrate* them back into the flow. Here are some tips:

1. Imagine your partner is asleep and you wish not to awaken her.
2. Some transitions require directness and speed; others are best performed slowly. Know which are which.
3. The body stays afloat when pulled by the head.
4. The body rolls most easily when it is aligned around its longitudinal axis.
5. Catching a leg or stepping in must be done at exactly the right moment in the movement flow.
6. Our own body mechanics of turning, traveling, sinking and rising must be exactly timed to the spatial behavior of partner.
7. As in life, faith in self, vision of the goal, and courage are helpful to cultivate.
8. "It's easy," makes a good mantram.