

## **BODY MOVEMENT**

from Trauma Healing and Transformation, Chapter 4, p. 212-217

—Patricia Mathes Cane, Ph.D.

Movement, dance, and music are powerful ways to release traumatic stress and balance energy. When our Capacitar team co-coordinated the Healing Tent for the NGO World Forum on Women in Huairou, China in 1995 with the Chinese Medical and Traditional Medical Associations, the women doctors taught us dances that the people of China use to release the stress of the day. One lively dance used movements that criss-crossed the limbs to release blocked energy and balance the meridian flows. The doctors said that the Chinese use music for healing in their clinics. In *The Mozart Effect*, Don Campbell describes how music has the power to stimulate our innate healing systems by connecting us with the deeper rhythms of life. Research has shown that music can strengthen memory and learning, boost productivity, regulate stress-related hormones, boost the immune function, affect body temperature, increase endorphin levels, reduce muscle tension, improve body movement and coordination, and affect respiration, heartbeat, pulse rate, and blood pressure. Music has a positive effect on people who have suffered some kind of physical or emotional trauma, and is currently used in some hospitals to alleviate pain or anxiety connected with surgery or medical procedures. Steven Halpern pioneered the use of music for inducing higher states in the mind/body with different rhythms and tones. Kay Gardiner applied musical tones and sounds for self-healing and for balancing the chakras. Traditionally song and chant have been used to connect the person and community with the sacred, to give meaning to life's rituals, and to bring joy and energy to all. Chant and song involve breath and sounds that have been passed on through many generations. Robert Gass in *Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound* speaks of the power of chant to anchor and entrain as well as to connect us with the healing energy of the morphic field of the music. "The ancient chants have been infused with power and meaning from the voices and devotion of millions of people over the centuries, creating a kind of energy field that impacts us here today as we intone the sacred syllables."

Movement, dance, and music are essential to the cultures of indigenous and grassroots people. Often when I ask groups about how they deal with emotional pain and stress, they answer, "Oh we dance it off!" Zorba the Greek in Nikos Kazantzakis' novel danced out the joy, the pain, and the grief of his life—the death of his son, the failure of a project, the loss of a friend. Research has shown that dance and movement can be significant therapies for the healing and empowerment of survivors of abuse and violence. In the section that follows are some simple suggestions on ways to use movement, dance, and music for communal healing.

### **What the Body Wants**

—Jim Gunshinan

The body wants to dance.  
It wants to get up off the floor and dance.  
It wants to get up out of the chair, and dance;  
to get from behind the desk and dance;  
to get out with people and dance.  
The body wants to move.

The body wants to move and touch  
and move together with other bodies.  
It wants to smell other bodies  
and taste other bodies.  
It wants to be up to it's neck in body.  
The body wants to be a body.  
The body is tired of waiting  
and resting beneath the mind.  
The body falls asleep thinking.  
It can't stand the wait  
between action and action. . .  
It wants to move out into the world . . .  
It wants warmth, sunshine,  
breezes and wet sand between its toes.  
It wants to jump in water and float.  
It wants to fly.  
It wants to feel with every cell  
the pull of gravity  
and the centrifugal force of turning.  
It wants its energy  
and it wants its peace and tranquility.  
The body wants to know that it is not alone.  
The body want to vibrate to its own voice  
and to feel harmony with other voices  
and dissonance.  
It wants to dance slow and dance fast,  
to flow, to thrust, to bend, to be still.  
It wants to make beautiful lines and to be seen.  
The body wants everything.  
It does not want to be bounded.  
The body wants to dance. . .

## **Free-Form Dancing**

One of the best ways to release blocked energy and open meridians is free-form dancing. Genevieve Paulson in Kundalini and the Chakras says that free-form dance is exceptionally helpful to keep energy flowing and to prevent blockages that cause pain or other physical problems. "Free-form dancing generally includes a lot of arm movement, bringing energy releases and great changes in the body.... At first most people feel comfortable moving only the upper part of the body; but be sure to include the bottom half as well. Many people feel bound up or restricted by their bodies and wish to be free of them. They forget they added the restrictions in the first place, whether through blocking expression or creating body tension

through fear, excessive worry or overwork. We can learn to feel great freedom through the body.”

## **The Dance of the Trees**

Free-form movement can use nature to help participants connect with healing images. Movement done out of doors under the trees or surrounded by mountains and clouds is a wonderful way to release traumatic stress, to breathe in pure fresh air, to absorb the healing rays of the sun. If it is not possible to be outdoors, you can lead the group in a guided visualization where they go into a garden and connect with the trees, flowers, running water, etc. When they have internalized these images you can then invite them to move with free-form dance using the following as a guide. This can be done in silence to the sounds of nature, or you can have some flowing music to accompany the dance.

Breathe deeply and imagine that you are a special tree planted in the garden. What kind of tree are you? Pine, eucalyptus, redwood, oak, willow, cypress, palm, magnolia, apple, etc. (Name trees appropriate to the culture and region.) What does it feel like to be this tree? Become that tree. Move for a few moments like the tree that you have chosen to be. Now imagine the tree going through the cycles of nature. First you are a young sappling growing strong, with roots running deep into the rich soil of Mother Earth, and branches reaching up to the heavens. As your tree matures, you begin to bear flowers and then fruits or cones. Feel your fruitfulness and the abundance of your harvest and seeds. And then you pass into the autumn of your cycle, with the fruits, seeds, and leaves falling into the ground, to become part of the soil. The cold of winter comes and your branches are dormant. You move into a period of great stillness and hibernation, holding life deep within you. And then come the first rays of springtime, warming your branches and roots. The first leaves and buds begin to sprout until you are an amazing burst of beautiful blossoms, alive with new life and possibility. Throughout the cycle of your life feel your rootedness to the earth. When storms and winds whirl around you, you have the flexibility and balance to move with it all, because you are deeply rooted and grounded on Mother Earth. Take a few moments now to flow with the grace and beauty of your tree. And when you are ready, gradually bring your dance to a close. Feel the beauty and grace of your body, and the strength and peace of your being.

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After the dance you can process what the experience was like. What kind of tree were you? What were the cycles like? What feelings came up? Where did you feel tightness or tension in your body?

## **Resources for Further Study**

### **Books**

Blades, J. & Dean, J. How to Play Drums. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985.

Campbell, D. The Mozart Effect: Tapping the Power of Music to Heal the Body, Strengthen the Mind and Unlock the Creative Spirit. NY: Avon Books, 1997.

Gass, R. Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound. NY: Broadway Books, 1999.

Halpern, S. Sound Health: The Music and Sounds That Make Us Whole. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.

Hawkins, H. The Heart of the Circle: A Guide to Drumming. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1999.

Klöwer, T. The Joy of Drumming: Drums and Percussion Instruments from Around the World. Harper SF, 1990.

Somé, M. Ritual: Power, Healing, and Community. NY: Penguin/Arkana, 1997.

### **Music: For Dance and Community**

Robert Gass & On Wings of Song selections: Chant, Omna mayaha Shiva, Alleluia, Kyrie, Gloria, and others.

Drums, Geoff Johns. Sounds True Recordings.