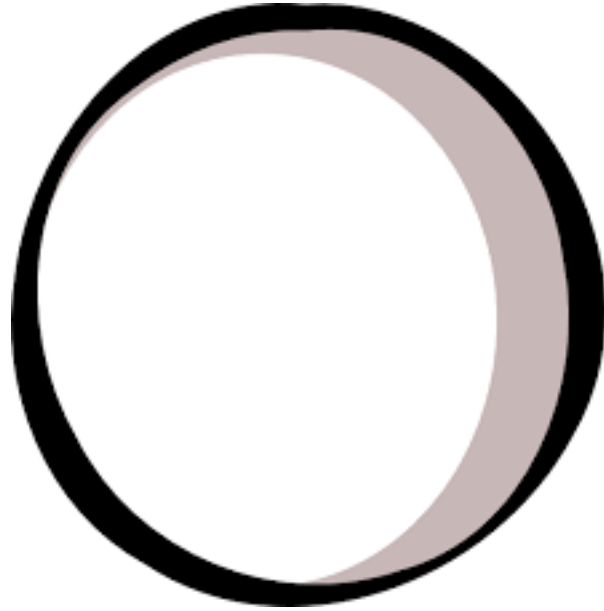


**Welcome to the
Discipline of**



**Authentic
Movement**

Picture a three-year-old child playing on the floor. He rolls along the rug and comes to rest against the sofa. He puts the crown of his head down on the floor and waves a leg in the air. He stands up and jumps, flailing his arms. At any moment he may turn into a pirate with arms akimbo or a firefighter shooting a hose of water. His body is mostly in motion, and all the movements are felt with his whole being. He has no mask, and he's not trying to please anyone.

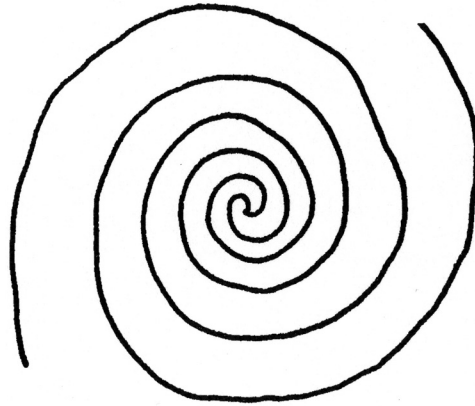
We all started out with this uninhibited, full-bodied expression of self, but somewhere along the way, we got disconnected from it.

Authentic Movement is a way to reclaim the wholeness of childhood, to grow into a fuller, more integrated human being. It is a unique form of personal growth and expression that is based in the body and includes the practice of witnessing.

How does it work?

In the deceptively simple form, you move with your eyes closed in order to pay attention to inner rather than outer impulses. There is no music because music can distract you from what's within you. There's just you, in your body, with permission to move however you will, in the presence of a witness, who will give you full, supportive, and non-judging attention.

You have to be willing to step into the unknown, but in a safe, supportive environment. You have to start with some inner strength and stability. But the form is simple, and all you have to do is show up and try it out. You begin by coming into your own body.



Coming Into Your Body

Typically in our culture, we spend most of our time only dimly aware of body sensations. As a worker sits and thinks at a computer, a shoulder ache might remind her that she does have a body, but she will probably try to ignore the discomfort and carry on as if she hadn't felt it. She is disconnecting from her body and losing her access to her body's intelligence.

Our intelligence comes from our whole bodies, not just from our brains. We acknowledge this in phrases like "having a gut feeling" or someone being a "pain in the neck." Our bodies remember everything that ever happens to us, usually in ways that are more honest than our mind's memories.

During an Authentic Movement session, you are invited to come into your whole body and to feel all the sensations in all of it. As you close your eyes and begin to listen, you will naturally sense impulses to move or to be still, and you can let impulses flow into movement.

Following Inner Impulses

In this practice, you allow your body to move in whatever way feels right. This is radically different from our usual patterns. Most of the time, we barely move at all, except to walk and sit. When we do engage in physical activities, we typically give our bodies complicated commands to follow.

Think of sports like baseball or tennis, or dancing like ballet or the tango. Golfers or ballet dancers work toward directing their bodies to perfect certain pre-determined moves. Often they push their bodies, continuing even when muscles are getting sore or when injury results.

Moving from inner impulses is almost the opposite. If your body wants to curl into a ball, you curl up. If your legs want to stretch and kick, you let them go.

Following inner impulses involves a surrender into the unknown. You don't know ahead of time what impulse (if any) will come. Everything is spontaneous and unplanned. You may have the experience of "being moved" as well as simply moving.

Maybe this seems scary to you. What if you have no impulses at all? What if your movements are clumsy or boring? Or maybe the movement that comes will be the most exciting thing that ever happened in your life and will give you new dimensions of freedom.

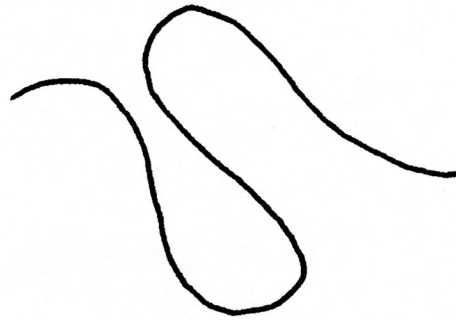
Your movements may seem meaningless sometimes and important other times. Is anyone judging your movements?

This leads us to . . .

The Inner Witness

While you are out there in the studio, moving with your eyes closed and following inner impulses, what is happening in your mind?

Does your mind start chattering, the way most minds do? Are you critical of your movement or wondering what someone else might think of you?



Are you aware of your movements, your feet on the floor, your elbow at your waist? Do you feel the stretch in your arm? Are you aware of images that come into your mind? Maybe you feel as though you're swimming in cold water. Maybe you relive an event from your life. Are emotions arising? Are you feeling anger as your feet stomp on the floor?

A vital part of the work of the discipline is developing the quiet, non-judging internal witness, the part that is aware of everything that's happening as it happens, without commentary. This development is the work of a lifetime and similar to practices of other disciplines like mindfulness meditation.

Unique to Authentic Movement, however, is the presence of an external witness, who supports the development of your internal witness.

The External Witness

You begin moving in the presence of a trained witness. You might be the only mover or one of several, but always a witness will be present. The witness is an experienced mover who has a well-developed internal witness herself and is trained to give full, compassionate attention to you without making judgements about your movement.

Being non-judgmental is itself a practice; it includes not praising as well as not criticizing. The witness won't tell you that your movements are awkward or silly; she also won't say that you're graceful or interesting or beautiful. She won't analyze or interpret your movements.

So what does she do? She's paying close attention, watching every physical movement and even trying to keep track of all the movements that go by. And when sensations and images arise, the witness is taking care to be clear that she can know only the sensations arising in her own body and being, not in the mover's. The mover may be imagining swimming in cold water, but the witness may feel sensations of struggling through mud. The mover may be feeling happy as he "swims"; the witness can't know this and doesn't try to figure it out. The witness may feel something entirely different or have no emotion at all. Her job is to track her own experiences in the presence of the mover.

By separating her experience from the mover's, she does not project anything onto the mover. Learning about projections is a major aspect of the work, one that has far reaching effects on one's everyday life.

After a given movement time, the mover(s) and witness speak and listen. The mover speaks first, and the witness speaks in service of the mover.

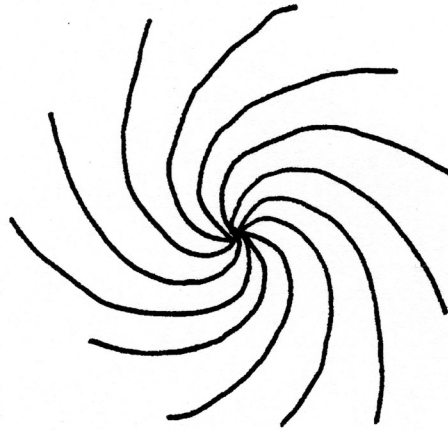
The Magic

So here you have the essential ingredients:

~the mover following inner impulses, coming into her body, and letting movements flow and be expressed spontaneously;

~her inner witness, aware of physical movement, sensations, and emotions without judging; and ~

~the external witness, fully present, tracking the mover's physical journey and his own (the witness') responses without judgment, interpretation, or projection.



When you put these ingredients together in an alchemical pot, magic begins to happen. With a more healthy relationship to internal and external critical voices, real freedom and expression emerge. Unconscious material becomes manifest in movement and comes into consciousness. Maybe it is anger long suppressed that comes out in pounding feet and punching arms. Maybe it is grandiosity that had been stifled in the nice, demure woman. Maybe it is impishness or the wildness of a lion.

The strong internal and external witnesses make it safe for these cut-off, shadowy parts to come out into the open. And once we can bring them into consciousness, a greater wholeness emerges. We reclaim the gift of our whole selves.

Witnessing Another

Once your internal witness gets strong, you can begin to witness another mover, by following the model your external witness has provided. Especially at first, witnessing is challenging work. So many movements go by in such a short time! How can you remember them all? How do you keep your mind from wandering? How do you refrain from guessing what the mover is experiencing and what his movements mean? These skills come with practice and experience, and again it is a lifetime's work to become truly skilled.

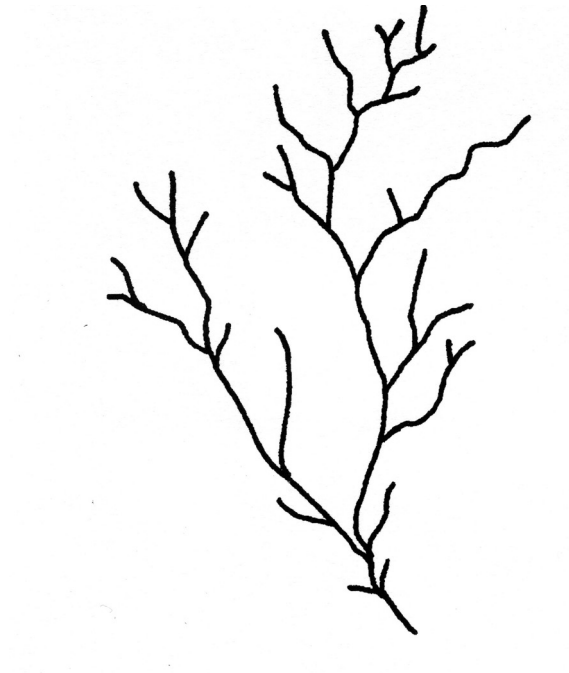
The relationship between mover and witness is rich and complex. As the mover, you trust that your witness is staying present to you and not projecting onto you. As a witness, you are keeping separate from the mover but working to stay fully present to him.

This relationship becomes a laboratory for looking at all other inter-personal relationships in our lives. Learning the witness' skills has enriched my life more than any other practice. These skills help me deal with the biggest challenges of my life: In my marriage, how do I take care of myself and stay fully present and loving to my husband? As a parent, how do I let my children become fully themselves, not doing something for my approval but for their own fulfillment? At the same time, how do I let them know I am here for them, paying attention, caring? As I watch my mother dying, how do I stay with her without taking on her pain?

Speaking as a Witness

After the moving time, we might set aside time for drawing and writing, which can serve as a transition from the movement to more conscious, verbal awareness of what has happened.

Or we might go directly to a sharing time of speaking and listening. Movers speak first because they have the primary experience of the movement. When (and if) a witness speaks, he takes great care to be clear that what he says is about his own experience and not necessarily about the mover.



Nuances of language turn out to be important. For example, speaking in first person makes clear the distinction between my own experience and another person's. "I feel fear arise in me as I see you crouch in the corner." The mover may or may not have felt fear.

Practicing the Discipline of Authentic Movement gives you a new ear to hear language

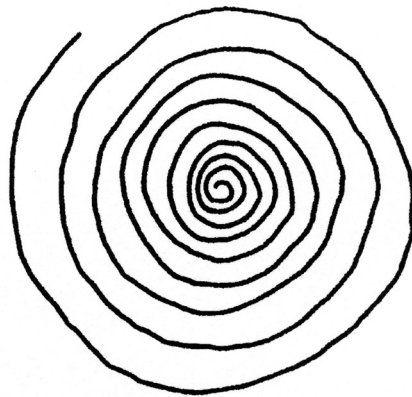
all around us. Listen some time to a soap opera. "You did that on purpose to make me jealous. You're despicable." Such language is great for creating melodrama but can make shambles of our lives. What a difference to say, "I'm feeling left out when you pay so much attention to someone else." Careful, conscious language leads to healthier relationships.

Relationship to Therapy

As it is commonly known today, a general form of Authentic Movement grew out of dance movement therapy. Many people practice Authentic Movement as a form of psychotherapy. The therapist is the witness, and the client is the mover.

Movement has tremendous potential for healing of the psyche. Our earliest, pre-verbal experiences may be remembered only in our bodies. Movement enables us to access these and all other body memories. Material may emerge that doesn't come out in years of talk therapy.

Teachers of the Discipline of Authentic Movement are trained in psychotherapy or body-based healing practices. Even when Authentic Movement is not practiced as a form of psychotherapy as such, it is naturally healing, and therapeutic work does occur. The teacher not only teaches the basic form of mover and witness, but also takes responsibility for setting the guidelines that help create a psychologically safe space. The new mover also assumes responsibility for taking care of herself and not hurting anyone else. As her internal witness develops, she also participates in holding the safety of the space.



Creativity and Fun

Your non-judgmental inner witness leads you to new freedoms, which in turn lead to greater creative expression. As you reconnect to the child within you and your playful self, you can just plain have fun.

All of us humans are artists, and we each need to express our own creativity. Artists of all kinds can benefit from the Discipline of Authentic Movement. A painter's blank canvas or a writer's page become less intimidating when one gets used to the emptiness of the movement circle. A dancer can connect to more deeply felt movements and dance from more of a heart place, less from mechanical—if spectacular—movements. An actor can be more present to the others on stage because he has witness skills. All of the arts depend upon the free and full expression that Authentic Movement enhances.

Spiritual Practice and Mystical Experience

The Discipline of Authentic Movement is a body-based spiritual practice in much the same way that meditation is a spiritual practice. One difference is that we watch the movements of the body in addition to the contents of the mind. Both practices invite mystical experiences.

What makes you move the way you do? Where does the impulse come from? When you have the experience of “being moved,” what exactly is moving you? These are deeply mysterious questions, with no plain answers. By venturing into this unknown and becoming familiar with it, we open to forces greater than ourselves. How each one experiences that unknown is utterly individual. Some might think of it as the divine within, or an inner light, or God. It doesn't need to be defined. A strengthened connection to this unknown is an enormous gift of great power.

I invite you to explore the Discipline of Authentic Movement to experience for yourself all its benefits.

Joan Webb

Joan joined a weekly Authentic Movement group led by Diana Levy in 1990 and immediately fell in love with the practice. In 1992-93 she completed a year-long training with Zoe Avstreich and has been teaching ever since. She has studied from 1995-2018 with Janet Adler in annual 5-day group retreats, where she participated—under Janet’s leadership—in the unfolding and development of the Discipline of Authentic Movement into its current form. She is a faculty member of Circles of Four.

With Annie Geissinger and Paula Sager, Joan is a founding co-editor of *A Moving Journal*, an international publication devoted to writings and art relating to Authentic Movement, published from 1994-2006.

Joan teaches the Discipline of Authentic Movement individually, in small groups, and in special workshops and retreats in her barn in rural Seekonk, Massachusetts, just outside Providence, Rhode Island.

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