

Betsy Beckman on Movement Therapy: Is it for you?

JOURNEY recently interviewed Betsy Beckman, a movement therapist with the Institute for Transformational Movement in Seattle.

JOURNEY: How would you define movement therapy?

BECKMAN: In movement therapy, a person comes to discover his or her own spontaneous, unique movements and expressions. A person becomes aware of places of holding or tension in his or her body and discovers movements that have been stored in these areas. Movement is a mode of therapy that is transforming. It brings forth the natural creativity and healing capacities from a person's body and spirit.

JOURNEY: Why would someone go to a movement therapist?

BECKMAN: If a person wanted to be more in touch with their body. If they wanted a sense of freedom and unselfconsciousness with their body. Most people feel fear and trepidation initially. They are aware of places in their body that feel tight, stiff, and painful. This comes from holding emotional experiences in the body. When a person works in movement therapy, they can clear those experiences (things from the past) and experience more freedom and opportunity in the present.

JOURNEY: Do individuals often do movement therapy in combination with other therapies? By itself? Variations?

BECKMAN: People often do a combination. Many of my clients also see a talk therapist. Some will do movement one week, talk the next, and so on. Many people find a need to do movement therapy and connect with their body to move on to the next level. Movement therapy can give an individual new information about themselves to process in their talk therapy sessions.

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JOURNEY: Due to the increase in understanding and attention given to dysfunctional families, child abuse, and related issues, do your clients come in with an increased awareness?

BECKMAN: Yes. The awareness provides a foundation. People have more of a context. They understand more of the "what" and "why" of their patterns, but need help on the "how" to move through them.

JOURNEY: As a whole, do you find movement therapy to be more intense than other types of therapy? Does this depend upon the individual client?

BECKMAN: Movement therapy is more intense generally. Of course, it does depend on the client. We are more comfortable as a people talking about our issues. It's not as experiential. As a culture, we are geared towards intellectualizing. We are not very body-oriented.

Movement therapy is made to facilitate weeping, leaping, striking out, relaxing into the Earth—the release of freeing energy. It involves the whole body, not just talking about feelings. A payoff is that because of this intensity, the experience of clearing is that much greater.

JOURNEY: People can be aware of a mind/body split or body splits but be afraid of what their body may express in

movement. Does our body have a "denial of its own"? Do you believe the body has an innate wisdom that does not allow more issues to come up than a person is ready to handle?

BECKMAN: Definitely. Things come up when someone is ready. Notice I said ready, not necessarily comfortable. Many things can come up that are not comfortable. Someone may work on one layer and not know there is more. A year later, they may find another layer they didn't know was there and were not ready to face the year before. I'm not sure we ever run out of layers. After awhile though, we do learn how "to go with our energy" rather than resisting it.

JOURNEY: How are memories stored in the body? How are memories expressed through movement therapy?

BECKMAN: As a baby, we may reach out. If our reaching out is met with anger, we associate reaching out with anger. The movement itself becomes unsafe to make. We learn to hold that movement in our muscles, such as stiffening our jaw, pulling back, clenching fists, etc. We say we are "stressed out." What does this mean? It means energy is not flowing, we are not exchanging energy in and out of our bodies. We are holding.

To uncover a memory, we go back into our holding back. In fact, in going into it, we exaggerate the holding. As we do that, distinct memories may emerge of people or situations in our life where we were unable to reach out because it was not safe. Out of our body comes the memory of the movement we withheld. To heal the memory, we bring forth the movement we didn't make in the past. As in this case, we may strike out in anger toward the person in our memory or we may reach out for the love that wasn't

available in the past. We also learn to reach out to ourselves. We learn it is okay to reach out.

JOURNEY: How would you begin to work on anger? No, let's go further—how would a person begin to work through RAGE?

BECKMAN: Begin small. Claw a pillow. Stomp around. Start in ways that feel manageable. People are afraid the emotion will take over and overwhelm them. So they hold it in and don't express it at all. It becomes a control issue. If others controlled you when you were little, now you have internalized that control and exert it over yourself. You can begin to be in loving relation to yourself rather than in a power/control struggle.

At some point, you embrace the anger of yourself. You may do a 2-minute anger dance. Giving yourself a time limit helps. You can recognize that you stayed in charge and expressed the feeling. You may also notice that your spine is still stiff. You may express more the next time, start to feel scared, and stop. The key is PACING. Next time you may do a tiny dance. And the next time you may go for it and use your whole body, and you feel exhilarated. Then the next day, you'll probably close in again and feel afraid. It's about opening up and clos-



Betsy Beckman (left) instructs Joy Rain.

ing down. It's very important to respect and honor the process. In doing that, you respect and honor yourself and your needs.

JOURNEY: Do you find that different parts of the body hold different sorts of pain? Or pain inflicted by different people within a person's childhood?

BECKMAN: I don't follow any codified system. I occasionally refer to such systems as the Chinese understanding of body energies and medicine. Areas often contain two varied energies, such as the chest and heart will contain anger as well as love. This is true for the pelvis as well. When the area is freed up, one frees the ability to express anger as well as to express love. Two sides of the same coin.

JOURNEY: Movement therapy often has intensives. What is the benefit of meeting for 3 hours four to five nights a week?

BECKMAN: When you come once a week, you leave and go into the old patterns quicker. If you come five times a week, you go to new places and experience new reverberations in your whole life. It can be a very powerful experience. It can be difficult when it's over which is why many people continue in movement in a less intense way. Many people also decide to enter a training program to go farther, motivated from inner realizations.

JOURNEY: Can you describe some of the common physical reactions to expressing emotions through bodywork?

BECKMAN: People who are doing movement therapy and having breakthroughs will often have physical manifestations such as: diarrhea, urination, rashes, nose running, diarrhea. It's about release. This can frighten people by its intensity. They may think it's a negative consequence. Actually, it's healthy. It means there's a freeing up of energy.

JOURNEY: How did you decide to be a movement therapist?

BECKMAN: I've been a dancer and a cho-

grapher since childhood. I performed mostly in churches and theaters. Many of my performances were liturgical based. For instance, I would dance Mary, whose son, Christ, was crucified and killed. I learned to find those feelings in myself by dipping into my own spiritual and emotional journey. I found a power like nothing else I had ever experienced. I discovered my calling.

After college, I moved from liturgical dancing into a more intensive emotional phase and looked for places to study. I realized I could do some of this later, so I danced professionally for some time. I've been doing movement therapy for six years. Three years as a student.

I work on staff for the Institute for Transformational Movement. We offer many different and varied services. They range from private sessions, 1 hour emotics (stop on the way home from work, let it out, go home and have a nice night), free demonstrations, separate classes, group sessions, intensives, etc.

JOURNEY: Much of your work is about helping people to trust their bodies. How do you facilitate a person beginning to know their own body?

BECKMAN: I use an intuitive approach. In individual sessions, I start at the level the person is comfortable with. With someone not ready for emotional work, I will have them walk around the room feeling their feet touching the floor. I will choose a particular focus. They may notice how different they feel with different ways of walking. Like, "When I walk with my heel first, I feel assertive" or "When I put my toes like this, I feel scared!" And they start to say, "Oh, when I'm rushed, I walk this way." I support people working at the edge it is appropriate for them to work at.

In a group, I give more structure. Each person finds their own structure at a comfortable level to them, within the structure I

(continued on page 5)

Movement Therapy

(continued from page 4)

have set up.

JOURNEY: Do you actually feel as if you are seeing the small child emerge within the adult body during movement work?

BECKMAN: It takes time. Some go quickly to the child. Others need more time and safety to go to the child. I treasure the experience of working with the child. This is not to say that being in the child is always enjoyable. But, there are many experiences of the child that need healing.

It is important to recognize in movement therapy that you can have fun. If you are attached to always having fun, it's not going to work for you. I have found both in my own experience and with clients, that the emotion we seem to feel the most is the one we are least able to move through. What happens is, the emotion is attempting to find an outlet, an expression. But we keep putting a cap on it, not letting it be fully expressed. Therefore, the expression is always frustrated, never complete. For example, someone may seem to be angry a lot because they don't know how to move through their anger.

Another example of this is fear. If a child is afraid a lot, they may be into achievement and be very performance-based. They will pretend to self and to others that they aren't afraid. It will be a big surprise to begin to feel their fear. Yet, it is crucial to know the emotion to work it through. Emotions are energy. When we block off emotions, we block off energy.

JOURNEY: Have you found that people who have lived primarily in their heads are more than average in terms of articulateness? If this is true, do people lose the articulateness as they move into emotions and body?

BECKMAN: Sometimes. People who have primarily lived in their brain can be very articulate. There is an interim time when integration is occurring that people may feel less articulate because they are speaking from different parts of themselves. It takes awhile to feel comfortable with new ways of communication.

However, I believe that when people move into their bodies and their hearts, their communications are much more powerful. The power comes from a sense of connectedness. There is more color and depth to their communication. It is completed communication in that it is coming from a deeper place within the person.

JOURNEY: Movement therapy seems like such an organic way of healing.

BECKMAN: It's completely natural. We are born expressing ourselves. Inhibition is learned. Movement therapy, getting in touch with our bodies, is a chance to re-parent ourselves. By allowing for expressions of emotion we create safety for our own inner child and its natural expressions.

(The Institute for Transformational Movement is located at 1607-13th Avenue, Seattle, Washington. Call (206) 329-8580, for information on programs.)