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Oracles

Authentic Movement and the *I Ching*¹

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From many years of moving, I have come to see Authentic Movement as a way to enter a place of deep knowing, allowing me to connect to inner guidance through my body. I believe that through moving and via the dialogue with a witness, one can begin to integrate the messages of this inner guide (the "Self") with a more conscious awareness (the "ego"). As Jung (1964) stated:

The self can be defined as an inner guiding factor that is different from the conscious personality... It may emerge very slightly or it may develop relatively completely during one's lifetime. How far it develops depends on whether or not the ego is willing to listen to the messages of the self. (p.162)

Through an ongoing practice, Authentic Movement becomes an oracle of direct communication with such internal guidance and with guidance from the personal and collective unconscious as described by Jung (1964, p.107). Whitehouse (1979) draws on Jung's theories in a description of such a process:

while consciousness looks on, participating but not directing, co-operating but not choosing, the unconscious is allowed to speak whatever and however it likes... Images, inner voices, move suddenly from one thing to another. The levels from which they come are not always personal levels; a universal human connection with something much deeper than the personal ego is represented. (p.83)

This guidance is often communicated in movement through symbolism and imagery, similar to the methods of text-based oracles.

For a period of years, along with an ongoing practice of Authentic Movement, I was also consulting an ancient Chinese book of oracles, the *I Ching: The Book of Changes*, for insight. Over 4000 years old, the *I Ching* eventually became one of the five classic texts of Confucianism, providing a common source for both Confucianist and Taoist philosophy. There are both similarities and differences between practicing Authentic Movement and consulting with the *I Ching*, yet each experience provides wise counsel

and deep insight. One similarity seems to be that Authentic Movement and the *I Ching* are each believed to be sourced in the unconscious. In his foreword, Jung (1949) states: "the *I Ching* is more closely connected with the unconscious than with the natural attitude of consciousness" (p.xxxii). My experiences in the summer of 1989 confirm Jung's idea and extend it to the practice of Authentic Movement, as well as reveal intriguing differences between the *I Ching* and Authentic Movement. Although during my years of practice I had often felt my movement to be connected to a deeper source, a comparison of the symbols in my movement to that in the counsel received from the *I Ching* seemed to offer me proof that the symbolism occurring through my personal experience was sourced in a much larger collective unconscious, such as that to which Jung (1964) and Whitehouse (1979) both referred.

That summer, during graduate studies in dance at Wesleyan University, I met once a week with a colleague as part of an independent project in Authentic Movement that we had devised for a course in dance therapy. We alternated roles of mover and witness, keeping detailed notes about our experiences. We also kept notes about our simultaneous consultations with the *I Ching*, which, coincidentally, we had each been making in the past months as well. One example from my own movement still resonates in my memory and is reflected by this poem written directly after moving:

Stretching, shaking,
waving goodbye...tears
I am looking up at the ceiling,
inspecting, looking down in
disgust...

moving through a tunnel, deep in
the earth, pushing my way...

back to stand, up, clean off,
to wall, place my hands on the wall
solid, still, centered, knowing—

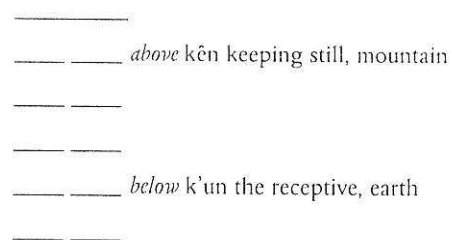
settle.

After moving and then writing, I shared my poem with my partner as we discussed the movement. She had particularly noticed the long time I spent looking up, and had sensed that I was looking at the ceiling as if it were crumbling down around me. This had, in fact, been the image that had so disturbed me. The image of a crumbling ceiling felt like a good metaphor for the then-current situation in my life; many aspects were changing and I was searching for a way to cope. I had felt a tremendous effort in the movement of digging my way through the dirt tunnel—pushing through the earth like a seed—and had finally experienced some hope by seeing a glimmer of light at the other end. The last position of stillness (with my hands on the wall), however, had been the most kinesthetically satisfying of all and had felt safe and centered—a relief. Perhaps this was all there was to be done: accept the fact that much of my life was changing, be still, and keep aware of my position while not trying to actively force a resolution.

Later that evening I consulted the *I Ching*. I threw my three coins, letting them fall, roll, and come to a rest, heads up or down as they would, holding the question in my

1 Paper was originally written in 1991, revised by the author in 2004.

mind, "How can I further understand the life situation facing me and proceed in balance?" I drew hexagram 23: *Po/Splitting apart*:



The text explains that "the lines of the hexagram present the image of a house, the top line being the roof, and because the roof is being shattered, the house collapses" (*I Ching*, p.94). Counseling a remembrance of the connection between decay and resurrection, the text refers to a grain of wheat when it sinks into the earth, showing that in sinking new life is again created. Finally, the commentary explains the "Judgment" or counseling for resolution of the situation as "Splitting apart: It does not further one to go anywhere" (*I Ching*, pp.500–1). The impossibility of counteracting the conditions of the time is stressed: the oracle advises, "that one should submit to the bad time and remain quiet;...it is not cowardice but wisdom to submit and avoid action...The situation bodes disaster, yet there is nothing to do but wait" (*I Ching*, pp.94–5).

In reading this, I was struck by the similarity, and in a sense synchronicity, of the sequence of imagery of my own movement and the corresponding imagery of the hexagrams in the *I Ching*. From the imagery of the roof being shattered and the house collapsing, to the seed pushing through the earth to emerge again, to the resolution of the movement, a counsel for stillness, each aspect had been reflected by my movement as well. I had "seen" the roof collapsing, felt myself as the seed pushing through the earth, and experienced the stillness that the *I Ching* counseled. Yet, one key difference resonated in and through these powerful synchronistic messages: while the *I Ching* counseled stillness, it was the movement that allowed me to arrive at a place of stillness within, and feel its appropriateness to my situation. Authentic Movement allows one to embody the lessons, experiencing both a shift in attitude and an understanding of that shift. Similarly, Whitehouse (1979) discussed the ramifications of such insights in our lives: "Moments of insight...reveal a direction and show a development, acting as support and encouragement for what must be lived through, creating energy for a next step" (p.83). In the case of the movement session described, my embodied experience had created an active "knowing" within me of what to do next, even if, in this case, the "next step" was non-action or stillness, a call to enter the void of liminality with grace and courage.

Both the *I Ching* and Authentic Movement continue to be powerful oracles for me. But it is through the body in movement, I feel, that a deeper transformation occurs that integrates, and yet goes beyond, intellectual understanding. Through the *I Ching* I am offered concepts; through the movement I gain experience. Likewise, since the movement experience of 1989 that I described, I have added a practice of daily meditation to my practice of Authentic Movement, which provides me with access to yet another type of direct revelation. What I have found is that by quieting the mind

and entering the inner stillness associated with meditation and the process of Authentic Movement, I can access guidance from the deeper knowing of the "Self" referred to by Jung (1964).

As the final hexagram, *Wei Chi/Before Completion*, states, "in order to handle external forces properly, we must above all arrive at the correct standpoint ourselves, for only from this vantage point can we work correctly" (*I Ching*, p.250). Likewise, each situation in our lives requires a response (be it movement or stillness, words or silence) based on attunement to the specific situation. Discerning the appropriate response with this amount of specificity requires deep looking, deep listening, and clear insight.

While neither Authentic Movement nor consultation with the *I Ching* has the power to change the external circumstances of my life directly, the former undoubtedly provides a means for me to sense, explore, and perhaps change my internal state of being, much as the ancient Chinese oracle is intended to counsel. Through movement, I can gain experiences and insights that transform me and, when brought into consciousness through my own process and/or through dialogue with a witness, support my development and growth. By listening to these messages from the Self, my actions in the world may more closely reflect my truest internal intent.

References

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