

Chapter 3

“Seeing another as she is – Loving her – enables me to see myself as I am” (Adler 1999b: 154).

Each of us holds the very human need to feel part of something bigger than ourselves. Janet Adler speaks of her own longing for embodied knowing, not just conceptual understanding, of “the web of interconnectedness”: “It is not enough when the development of the self excludes an integrated relationship to the whole” (Adler 1999a: 191). Maldoma Somé from the Dagara tribe writes beautifully of this, describing his own experiences of being part of the collective of his tribe: “I understood that what makes a village a village is the underlying presence of the unfathomable joy in being connected to everyone and everything” (Somé 1994: 301).

The wholeness of the collective echoes wholeness at both micro- and macrocosmic levels. We can see the earth in the body, the body in the earth, and how the collective spans from cellular to planetary bodies. We can also include the very elements that make up our planet – the earth and air and water which we share – which also make up our physical bodies. Circles within circles of life, arising and

passing away in rhythms of renewal and regeneration. Holding a transpersonal perspective, we can place human consciousness within the wider field of collective consciousness. In this light, we can hold a curiosity about our ability to listen and recognize how the earth body is speaking to us. I am curious about the notion of the Earth’s own intentions for healing. If we are that part of the Earth made conscious, what responsibility lies with us, as caretakers of “the more than human realm” (Abram 1996)? How can we be a conduit of inner listening, to receive the wisdom rising up from the dreaming of the Earth?

Awakening to the Collective Body

My own experiences of Authentic Movement have gradually led me to experience it as a spiritual practice, opening me to a sense of the collective body. My own experience of the collective body has ranged from experiences of group processes in retreat environments, as well as experiences of widening out to include a sense of the Earth and wider planetary life. It is these latter experiences that I will explore further now. I am curious about how



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Authentic Movement as a Path to Wholeness

the practice of Authentic Movement can open us to an embodied connection with the Earth body, and the wisdom such engagement might bring through at this time. I resonate deeply with the words of Native American ecopsychologist Jeanette Armstrong, in “Keepers of the Earth.” She writes:

We survive within our skin inside the rest of our vast selves ... Okanagans teach that the body is the Earth itself. They say that our flesh, blood, and bones are Earthbody; in all cycles in which the Earth moves, so does our body ... Our word for body literally means “the land-dreaming capacity.”
(Armstrong 1995: 320)

Environmental activist Marna Hauk explored this possibility of our Earth-dreaming capacity through a piece of embodied spiritual research in which 24 women were invited to “incubate” Earth-healing dreams in a “virtual Hygeian dream temple.” I love the reflections that emerged for Hauk in these explorations about where the dreams arise from, whether “the individual women, emergent dreamtime collectives, or planetary supersystem.” Whatever the case, she writes:

Earth dreaming practices cultivate reconnection with these larger states of planetary systemic intelligence and wholeness ... Through setting intention for incubating earth dreams ... we are birthing a renewing world from a dreaming matrix, becoming imaginal, oracular portals and instantiations of the voice(s) of the Earth while re-embodiment regenerative and life-giving wholeness.

(Hauk 2018: 186)

My experience of Authentic Movement is that it offers similar tools to open to an expanded awareness that can include a sense of the Earth’s voice and our own Earth-dreaming capacities. Adler writes of “the collective body as the energetic consciousness of the earthbody, which includes all

living beings” (Adler 1999a: 192). Working with the body, we discover how completely relational we are. We discover that parts that once felt isolated and alone are, in fact, deeply supported by surrounding layers of body systems. Each body system is richly diverse, wild, and dynamic as the ecosystems of our planet, reminding us of our connection to the wider whole.

We begin by listening to the earth, using the resources of the body. As we attend to underlying patterns, we recognize that body is part of earth – inseparable. Each individual is not alone but a participant in local and global bioregions, just as every cell is part of us.

(Olsen 2002: 227)

I would like to share a little personal experience from a group retreat, to reflect on how the collective can emerge, and which speaks to a quality of bodies expressing themselves as “the land-dreaming capacity.” On this specific retreat, we gather as an intimate group of four experienced movers, with Linda Hartley in her small studio in Norfolk. Arriving together, we are asked to name what we are bringing. We each speak, and so begin the process of weaving the personal and the collective: “Gratitude and grief ... Not knowing ... The beauty of the world ... Listening to the Earth ...” My description of moving and witnessing here is shared with permission from my fellow movers and I acknowledge that the words are my own perspective on a shared experience.

We work with the ritual practice, a particular form emerging from the Discipline of Authentic Movement, as pioneered by Janet Adler. We come to standing in a circle, creating our container for the practice. Witnessing the empty space, we each take time to feel into whether we will be a mover or witness, then declare ourselves, and make a little eye contact. Witnesses take their place in the